University of Alberta

Life Stories of Aboriginal Adults Raised in NonAboriginal Families

by

Simon Andrew Nuttgens

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Abstract

Despite the significant number of transracial Aboriginal adoptions that have taken place in Canada, especially through the 1960s and 1970s, little research is available that addresses the psychological and psychosocial ramifications for the children involved. The scant literature that does exist raises concerns about the psychological impact of this type of adoption, and thus indicates a clear need for additional research. The present research used narrative inquiry to bring greater understanding to the experiences of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families. The life stories of four Aboriginal adults were gathered through use of multiple audio-taped interviews. Seven "narrative threads" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) were found to run across the four participants' life stories: disconnection, passing, diversion, connection, surpassing, reconnection, and identity coherence. Through these narrative threads it is seen how the complex interplay between family, community, culture, and society bring shape to the individual identities of the participants. More specifically, the storied accounts of three of the four participants show how racial discourse and racial practices negatively impinge upon their developing identities while growing up in nonAboriginal families. Through the fourth participant's life story it is seen how a meaningful and sustained relationship with Aboriginal people and culture led to the development of a positive Aboriginal identity. The implications of this research are discussed for practitioners and educators of counselling psychology, along with suggestions for future research.

To My Family

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I pass on my sincere thanks to the members of my supervisory committee. Without their patient guidance and ongoing support, the completion of this work would never have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Part I

My Story

Aboriginal communities demand – and have the right – to
know who you are if you aspire to tell their stories.
(Fournier and Crey, 1997; p. 14)

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the experiences of Aboriginal adults raised in non-Aboriginal families. This is a retrospective inquiry which presents the life-stories of four Aboriginal adults, three of whom were adopted into White families, and one of whom was fostered by a White family from an early age. The decision to undertake this project was not happenstance, it was personal. From the time I was a toddler, and continuing today, Aboriginal children have lived as members of my family. Thus, the stories of my participants inescapably resonate with my own. Prior to beginning the interview process with participants, I told them my story. I did so in order to situate my interest and aspiration to do this work within a personal frame of reference. Now, as I introduce you, the reader, to the topic of this research, I shall do the same.

The story of how I became interested in the experiences of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families begins very early in my life at age two, which is when my parents first took in two Aboriginal foster children, brothers Nathan[1] aged five, and Kyle aged nine. At the time (1968), my family consisted of

[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout this account.

my parents, twin brothers a year older than me, and a younger infant sister. Of the two brothers, Nathan lived with us eight years, Kyle only three. Nathan left our home in 1976 at age fourteen, and until 1988 kept in close contact.

The next child that my parents fostered was Alice. Alice came into the family in 1973. She is believed to be of Aboriginal ancestry, though details of this remain vague. At age six, my parents adopted Alice and she has been an integral member of our family ever since. Following Alice, in 1975 my parents took into foster care Cory, who at the time was six years old. Cory, who is not of Aboriginal ancestry, is moderately mentally challenged and lived with us until age twenty-one. Though he was never officially adopted, Cory has always been considered a brother and remains in close contact with the family.

Next to come into my parents' care, this time through a room-and-board agreement, was Theresa, a nineteen-year-old Aboriginal woman, pregnant at the time. Though she came in 1987 and stayed only one year, Theresa remains very close to our family. She, her husband, and three girls attend all family functions. To the girls, I am considered their uncle, and to me, they are considered my nieces.

A year after Theresa moved out, my parents took in two Aboriginal siblings, Shauna, aged eight, and her brother, Russell, aged six. Russell lived with us for eight years. At about age twelve, Russell began having serious behaviour problems, which ultimately led to his removal from the home. Since this time, Russell has continued to have problems with the law. Shauna remained living with the family until age twenty-one, at which time she moved out to live with the father of her new baby.

In addition to the children mentioned above, my parents have fostered many other children for shorter duration, some of whom were Aboriginal. Childhood memories of growing up with Aboriginal siblings are decidedly positive. Memories of Kyle, though very faint, are certainly favourable. Memories of Nathan are much more vivid. To me he was a "cool" older brother. I recall thinking as a child that I was his favourite sibling, this because he would entrust me with details of his secret escapades – sexual liaisons, illicit substance use, and other such clandestine adolescent affairs. I recall on one occasion he had me stash what appeared to be marijuana joints in my fishing tackle box. I recall the solemnity of his cautionary direction not to tell anyone – even our other siblings – of the contraband in my possession. This made me feel important, and therefore happy to oblige his command.

Alice, though quite possibly of Aboriginal decent, was never looked upon as such a child. As far as memory serves, I have just always thought of her as my sister.

By the time Theresa, Shauna and Russell came to live with us, I had already left home, though in my perception, all three have become important members of our family, granted that since leaving in 1997, Russell has had very limited contact.

The circumstance of my childhood afforded me many years of living with Aboriginal siblings and extended family. It did not, however, provide me with an understanding of Aboriginal culture. As a family we did not participate in such activities, and to my knowledge, did not encourage participation by the Aboriginal children who lived with us. Since this time, reading books, learning from Elders, and participating in ceremonial experiences has increased my understanding and appreciation of traditional ways. Yet all told, I know very little. I am humbled by the

sheer scope of this subject matter, and realize that this type of learning is life-long and unending.

My involvement with the Spirit Rock Family Healing Society was instrumental to my initial learning. This Edmonton agency provides culturally based early intervention services for troubled youth and their families. From August 1998 to the fall of 1999 I participated as a volunteer, learner, and eventual board member.

Upon first contacting Spirit Rock, the question that was immediately asked of me was my reason for wanting to work with First Nations people. Recognizing the importance of this question, I have done my best to keep it close in mind through the course of this research. As I continue to reflect on my motives, additional insights come forth. Sometimes it seems as though I have been provided with a destination, and now have the task of discovering (or perhaps rediscovering) the paths that have lead me to this place. I know that my reasons for entering into this work are heavily influenced by my childhood upbringing, not only due to the continued presence of Aboriginal children as members of our family, but also due to certain values promoted by my parents. One such value, and one that has become an emblem of my work and training as a counselling psychologist, is that of social justice. Though not emphatic or demonstrative in their message, I believe my parents did encourage a sense that one should stand up for the rights of the oppressed, or at least not participate in acts of oppression. I believe that until my mid-twenties, my way of adhering to this value was simply through nonparticipation. I think that this has changed through the last nine or ten years, such that I am now more vocal when contesting injustice.

A turning point in this change came while taking a first year sociology class in 1990. I recall little of the content of this class, though do remember one particular filmstrip. This film depicted the ways in which Aboriginal people were treated during the early years of colonization in British Columbia. I remember learning about how small pox ruthlessly diminished the Aboriginal population, how the potlatch was banned as an illegal activity, and how Aboriginal children suffered terribly under the residential school system. The film touched me deeply, wherein once enlightened, there was no turning back. I now realized that what I thought I knew of Aboriginal people and their culture was presumptuous and largely based upon racist stereotypes learned in the community in which I was raised. The film did not singularly dismantle all of my unexamined beliefs and assumptions. Nor, by any stretch, did it furnish me with a comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal culture and social issues. What it did do was awaken within me the virtue of doubt, the type of which inspires one to critically question and examine the received ideas of one's socialization. This film was the first such awakening. Since then there have been more, and more, I believe, are yet to come.

My values concerning social justice, coupled with educational experiences and my family situation growing up, all converge upon the topic that I have chosen for this dissertation. And although my will to undertake this work is steadfast, I know that I must continue to question and reflect upon my motives. If I do not, I run the risk of proceeding with this endeavour for the wrong reasons; this would help no one, least of all members of the Aboriginal community.

Introduction: Part II

The Historical Context for this Research

The practice of transracial[2] adoption, that is a child of one race being adopted by parents of another, gained prominence in the mid-to-latter part of the twentieth century and has subsequently garnered much interest within social science research (Hollingsworth, 1997; Kim 1990; Simon & Alstein, 2000; Triseliotis, 1993). Studies that examine the experiences of children raised in families outside of their racial and cultural heritage emphasize concerns regarding general psychological adjustment, racial identity development, and social competence within a racist North American culture (Feigelman, 2000; Friedlander, 1999; Hollingsworth 1997; Moe, 1998; Triseliotis, 1993). To date, this research has failed to provide clear evidence that transracial adoption is, in and of itself, detrimental to an adoptee's psychological health (Bagley, 1992; Feigelman, 2000; Friedlander, 1999; Hollingsworth, 1997; Simon & Alstein, 1992; Triseliotis, 1993). This corpus of research remains controversial, however, due to important questions regarding the development of

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[2] In keeping with the adoption research literature, I will refer to such adoptions as being transracial, with the recognition that the concept of race is in many ways problematic. According to Sue (1998) the term "race" came into existence roughly 300 years ago and has both historically and currently been viewed as the biological classification of human characteristics based upon visible features such as skin pigmentation, head form, facial features, and colour and texture of body hair. This conceptualization has been criticized on several fronts, including 1) the superficial classification of physical traits wherein there exist far more biological similarities among groups than differences, 2) the lack of homogeneity among the supposed "pure" biological groupings, and 3) the lack of agreement among biologists as to just how many races exist (estimates range from 3 to 200). Despite these criticisms, Sue does not discard the concept of race but instead reconceptualizes it as a socially constructed concept that has important psychological and political ramifications for those who self-identify with a particular group. Viewed this way, the concept of race may be configured loosely as differences in various physical traits, though a more informative conceptualization draws upon a sociopolitical formulation. Sue identifies five socioracial groupings within North America: African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Latino/Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and White Americans.

racial identity among transracial adoptees and their accompanying sense of emotional security when faced with prejudice and discrimination (Bagley, 1993a; Feigelman, 2000; Friedlander, 1999; Hollingsworth, 1997). Findings that Black transracial adoptees adhere more to their parent's Americentric, versus Afrocentric, values (Deberry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996) and that increased incidents of racial discrimination among transracial adoptees is associated with greater incidents of adjustment difficulties (Feigelman, 2000), raise concern that identity difficulties may be problematic in at least some transracial adoptive situations. Though not backed by empirical research, it has likewise been suggested that Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families have very significant identity struggles, and that this stands in direct relation to experiences of racial and cultural oppression (Bagley, 1993b).

Certainly in Canada, it is widely accepted that Aboriginal peoples have faced discrimination and prejudice for centuries, and that such treatment remains pervasive within contemporary society (Frideres, 1983; McMillan, 1995; Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000; Milloy, 1999; Ward, 1984; York, 1990). Explanations for current and historical racism towards Aboriginal peoples implicate Canada's colonial legacy and its manifestation in many of the government's constitutional and legislative enactments (Frideres, 1983; McMillan, 1995; Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000; Milloy,

1999; Waldram, 1997; Ward, 1984; York, 1990). More specifically, the Indian Act[3] is repeatedly identified as an instrument of colonial ideology that has led to the suppression and subjugation of Aboriginal culture, language, and economic sustainability. Because of the unique sociocultural experience of Aboriginal transracial adoptees, research is needed that examines such individuals as a distinct racial and cultural group. Although this may seem obvious, some transracial adoption studies do not differentiate between the various racial groupings (Simon & Alstein, 1992).

The need for research into the experience of transracial Aboriginal adoption is accentuated when one considers the prevalence and sociopolitical significance of its occurrence. In Canada, the height of Aboriginal adoption occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, an era that came to be known as the "sixties scoop" due to the inordinate number of Aboriginal children adopted into White families (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Johnston, 1983; Ward, 1984; York, 1990). Between 1971-1981 there were 3729 such adoptions of status Indians alone (Johnston, 1983). Many were sent to private American adoption agencies where the high demand for children among middle-class families was well matched to the dollar figure often requested (Ward, 1984). Lack of restrictions for Canadian children entering the U.S. (compared to potential adoptees

[3] The Indian act placed all Aboriginal people under separate federal legislation, essentially making them wards of the government, and thus in a different legal category from all other Canadians (McMillan, 1995). Indian agents who worked for the government had sweeping powers. They alone could decide who was Indian and how the reserve lands could be used. McMillan states that "The Indian Act served to suppress Indian cultures and keep Indians locked in a state of dependency, with little control of their affairs" (p. 314). Deprived of traditional ways, Canada's Aboriginal people lost touch with their cultural heritage, and in doing so, lost touch with their identity as a people. The seriousness of this loss has led some writers to refer to colonial practices as cultural genocide (e.g., Kimelman, 1984; Frideres, 1983; Ward, 1984:, York, 1990).

from other countries) made the Canadian Aboriginal children all the more attractive to prospective American parents (Ward, 1984). York notes that from the early 1970's to 1982 over a thousand Manitoban Aboriginal children were sent to the United States for adoption[4] (York, 1990).

The sociopolitical climate leading up to the 1960's was fertile ground for the budding transracial adoption movement (Hollingsworth, 1997; Kim, 1990; Triseliotis, 1993; Ward, 1984). Mid nineteen-fifties North America was a time of rapidly changing social values that made it increasingly acceptable for women to have an abortion, use contraceptives, and keep a child borne out of wedlock. Shifting societal values meant fewer White babies were available for adoption, and hence, an increase in the desire to adopt children of other races (Kim, 1990). This fit well with a 1960's idealism, which sought, among other goals, to break down long held racial barriers and push towards greater tolerance and understanding among all groups. Concurrent with the sixties social context, was the ever-worsening conditions on the Canadian Indian reserves (Frideres, 1983; Ward, 1984).

After surviving generations of residential school abuse, Canada's Indian reserves were rife with problems. Alcoholism, violence, and various forms of abuse pervaded the once dignified existence of Canada's indigenous population (Ward, 1983; York, 1990). Knowledge of the effects of sexual and physical abuse helps explain the psychosocial dysfunction that developed within many Aboriginal

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[4] Kimelman (1984), in what has become the most important exposé of Aboriginal Child Welfare practices in Canada, vilified the situation in this province after conducting a two-year investigation into the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Kimelman's report refers to the child welfare practices as a form of cultural genocide, and likened it to the residential school movement, the latter succeeding the former as a continuation of the appropriation of Canada's Aboriginal children.

communities, yet in many cases it was poverty, not mental health concerns, that led to the seizure of Aboriginal children (York, 1990). Assumptions made by White middle-class social workers that poverty was commensurate with inadequate parenting increased the likelihood that Aboriginal children would be apprehended (Johnston, 1983; York, 1990).

The large-scale removal of Aboriginal children from their families during the 1960's and 1970's has produced what York (1990) refers to as the lost generation. The need for research in the area of Aboriginal adoption is heightened when one considers the equally significant numbers of Aboriginal children who have been taken into care through fostering and residential care. Hepworth (1980; as cited in Timpson, 1995) indicates that from 1976 to 1977 3.5% of all Status Indian children were under provincial care, compared to a rate of 1.4% among all children in Canada.

Though vast numbers of Aboriginal children have been placed in nonAboriginal families, research in this area remains scant. Studies conducted by Fanshel (1972) and Bagley (1993b) along with a limited number of biographical accounts (e.g., Tyman, 1989; York, 1990) represent the bulk of such investigation. As will be discussed later in my literature review, though limited, the available Aboriginal transracial adoption research does raise concerns regarding the adjustment of children who experience this form of adoption. Thus it seems clear that further inquiry into the experiences of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families is necessary. The present research aims to assist this enterprise through using narrative inquiry to present the stories of four Aboriginal adults raised in nonAboriginal

families. The research question thus asks: What are the life-stories of Aboriginal adults who were raised in nonAboriginal families?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Fundamentally, the present research is an inquiry into transracial and transcutlural parenting, more specifically, the rearing of Aboriginal children in nonAboriginal families. To contextualize this work within a broader field of research, I will review literature that examines different forms of adoption along with psychological processes thought to be integral to the transracial adoptive experience, namely theories of identity development.

In this literature review, I begin with an examination of psychological adjustment in same-race adoptions, followed by transracial adoptions, and ending with Aboriginal adoptions into non-Aboriginal families. Following this, I briefly present general criticisms of the adoption literature. Finally, I discuss various models of racial identity development including both specific and generic racial applications, as well as models relevant to individuals considered bi-racial. I end with a discussion of criticisms levied against modernist notions of self and race, and present alternative conceptualizations that have been proposed to better account for these phenomena.

Same-Race Adoption Adjustment

The idea of adoption as a stressful familial experience runs counter to prevailing myths and stereotypical beliefs. Adoption is often looked upon as a societal solution to the threefold problem of an unwanted pregnancy, a childless couple, and a homeless infant (Brodzinsky, 1990). Such views lead us to assume that following the adoption placement, life for all involved carries on without incident.

This "happily ever after" scenario is challenged by evidence that adopted children often experience some form of maladjustment prior to reaching adulthood.

Early research by Schechter, Carlson, and Simmons (1964) largely came to this conclusion. These researchers looked at the number of adopted children and adults found within psychiatric settings and found higher rates than would be expected given estimates of the number of adoptees found in the general population. This approach to studying the psychological adjustment of adopted children – determining the frequency with which adoptees are found in mental health settings – is one of three traditionally used within the adoption literature (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). The other two include assessing presenting symtomatology among adopted children seen in clinical settings and evaluating the psychological adjustment of adopted children in community-based samples using cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs (Brodzinsky et al., 1998).

Research that follows in Schechter's tradition of studying adoption adjustment generally obtain similar results: studies from Canada, the United States, and Great Britain all find evidence that the proportion of adopted children in both outpatient and inpatient mental health settings is between 3% and 13 %, with a conservative mid-range estimate resting at 4% to 5% (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). This is double what one would expect relative to the number of adopted children in the general population (2%).

Using presenting symtomatology among adopted children seen in clinical settings as an indicator of adjustment has resulted in inconsistent, and in some cases, contradictory results (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). Studies have variously reported

increased rates of academic problems and learning disabilities, increased rates of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorder, and higher rates of eating disorders, substance abuse, and personality disorders. For each of these, however, there are studies that negate such findings, thus leading Brodzinsky et al. (1998) to conclude that the research in this area is flawed, perhaps due to sampling and methodological differences across studies.

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of community-based samples seem to furnish the most consistent findings in the study of adoption adjustment. Studies that use these two research designs generally support the following developmental pattern of adjustment among same-race infant adoptees (Brodzinsky et al., 1998).

Adjustment difficulties are usually absent among children below age five, likely because during preschool years the concept of being adopted is still not fully understood. Without this understanding the knowledge that one is adopted is unlikely to produce an adverse loss reaction when disclosed by parents (Brodzinsky, 1990). As children reach middle childhood, academic, behavioural, and emotional difficulties may occur, and may last until early adolescence (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). The adjustment problems characteristic of adopted children in middle childhood coincides with, and are likely attributable to, the emergence of logical thought (Brodzinsky, 1990). A younger child may be able to describe in detail the events of their adoption, but this is usually a repetition of an adult account, and hence, is recited without full understanding. It is when the adopted child reaches the elementary school years that they acquire the cognitive capacity to more fully understand the implications of being adopted.

In Piagetian terms, this age roughly corresponds to the concrete operational stage of intellectual development, whereby children come to understand the world through reason, rather than naïve perception. At this age the adopted child's conception of the family moves from that of a group of people who live together, to an appreciation of blood relationships (Brodzinsky, 1990). According to Brodzinsky (1990), this realization creates confusion and stress for the adopted child, undermining his or her sense of security within the family. Middle childhood is also when adopted children first understand the idea of relinquishment, which can bring forth feelings of loss and a less affirming view of their adoption status within the family (Brodzinsky, 1990).

Although adjustment difficulties may occur during middle childhood and early adolescence, Brodzinsky et al. (1998) cautions that the majority of adoptees are still well within the normal range of psychological functioning. In fact, it is generally accepted that adult adoptees adopted in infancy by parents psychologically equipped to raise an adopted child, are indiscernible from other nonadopted adults (Bagley, 1993b; Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990).

How, then, can we make sense of studies that find a disproportionately high number of adoptees within mental health settings? Brodzinsky (1998) suggests that this may arise in response to a negative parental bias towards adopted children. In this view, parents of adopted children may be more anxious and insecure with their child's emotional and behavioural development, and thus more likely to refer their children to mental health services due to greater vigilance for psychological problems. Feelings of anxiety and insecurity might also lead adoptive parents to

respond with a negative bias toward their adopted child when answering behavioural questionnaires. This would help explain the increased clinical symptomatology that is sometimes reported in adoption studies (Brodzinsky, 1998). Finally, it is also possible that mental health professionals themselves are biased toward adopted children, and hence more likely to diagnose pathology among this group of clientele.

Summary of Same-Race Adoption Adjustment

In summary, it appears that despite increased numbers of adoptees found in mental health settings and inconsistent findings in regard to clinical symptomatology among adoptees (Brodzinsky, 1998), the long-term adjustment of most adopted children placed in infancy is quite positive (Bagley, 1993b; Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990). There may, however, be periods of disturbance marked by behavioural, emotional, and academic difficulties. Longitudinal research suggests that such difficulties are more likely to arise during middle childhood, at a time when children develop the cognitive capacity to more fully understand the adoptive situation.

Transracial Adoption Adjustment

Research on transracial adoption emerged in the 1970's at a time when debate and contention surrounded the adoption of Black American children into White families (Hollingsworth, 1997; Jones, 1972; Kim 1990; McRoy, 1994; Simon & Alstein, 2000; Triseliotis, 1993). The arguments of Chimezie (1975) are representative of those in opposition of the transracial adoption of Black children. Chimezie argued that 1) White adoptive families cannot equip Black children with the necessary psychosocial survival skills to develop an appropriate racial identity and deal with experiences of racism, 2) Black transracially adopted children will

ultimately acquire a confused identity and will likely be rejected by both White and Black communities, and 3) transracial adoption will undermine the Black community's collective struggle against historical and ongoing oppression.

Despite Chimezie's concerns, most social science research that asks the question: Is transracial adoption detrimental to emotional adjustment and overall well being? answers with a definite "no" (Bagley, 1993a; Friedlander, 1999). Repeatedly, studies that examine this form of adoption attest to the relatively benign effect that it has upon psychological adjustment.

Grow and Shapiro's (1974) early work is representative of this finding. These authors examined the scores of 125 Black transracial adoptee children on the California Test of Personality and found that 77 percent of participants showed evidence of "good" psychological adjustment. The scores of the transracial adoptees were also noted to match very closely to those of a White adoptee comparison group.

Shireman and Johnson (1986) obtained similar results in their longitudinal study of Black children raised in either single-parent, transracial, or traditional adoptive families. In this study interviewers rated adopted children according to four categories of adjustment (excellent, good, some difficulty, and serious difficulty) based on the children's scores on standardized test materials (Vineland Social Maturity Scale, Doll Family Puzzle, and Picture Interview), direct observation, and parent report. Their findings indicated that approximately 78 percent of children in all groups were either making excellent of good adjustment, leading the authors to conclude that most children will "grow well" in all three types of families.

In a particularly ambitious study of transracial adoption, Simon and Alstein (1992) followed 202 transracial adoptive families over a span of twelve years. At the end of this study – which describes in detail the outcomes of three phases of research – the authors pulled together a "collective portrait" of themes and patterns found among the majority of families who participated. The tone of their conclusion is decidedly optimistic: "We believe that the portrait that emerges is a positive, warm integrated picture that shows parents and children who feel good about themselves and about their relationships with each other" (p. 199). Regarding the degree to which the transracially adopted children felt bonded to their families, at the study's end all participants said that they considered their relationship with their parents to be permanent, even those who expressed discontent in their current family relationships.

It was noted that some of the parents in this study, mostly those who had adopted Native American or Korean children, made a concerted effort to familiarize their children with their cultural heritage. This was especially so when the children were young, though as the children increased in age, they became more interested in their own interests and pursuits, and thus less interested in their parents' aspirations to foster an integrated cultural identity.

> Had the children shown more interest, more desire to maintain ethnic contact ties, most of the parents would have been willing to do so, but in the absence of signals that the activities were wanted and meaningful to their children, the parents decided that the one-culture family was the easier route (Simon & Alstein, 1992; p. 200).

Unfortunately, deeper insight into the reasons behind the decline in interest are not provided, thus it is hard to judge the accuracy of the researchers' interpretation that the cultural activities were not wanted or meaningful.

As Simon and Alstein (1992) reflect upon their twelve years of research, they seem pleased to conclude that transracial adoption was not detrimental to the livelihood of either the adopted or nonadopted children:

> Both sets of responses, those obtained in 1972 and in 1984, consistently portray a lack of differences between Black and White children in these special, multiracial families, when differences have been and continue to be present between Black and White children reared in the usual single race family. It seems accurate to conclude that something special happens to both Black and White children when they are reared together as siblings in the same family. (p. 204)

A somewhat disconcerting assumption evident in the above statement is that all transracial participants are pooled together as simply "Black" even though 24% of the study's original sample were "Asian" or "Indian." Given the disparate sociohistorical experiences of the various cultural groupings, a differential assessment of the effects of race among the study participants would have been helpful and informative. Simon and Alstein (1992) conclude their study with a statistic which in their view is highly significant: 85 percent of the families still participating in the study said they would advise a family like their own to adopt a "nonWhite" child. This figure did not include 8 percent who said that in principle they would not offer advice to another family, and 1 percent who said they were uncertain of the advice

they would give. This enthusiastic vision of transracial adoption is tempered by the author's caveat that some parents did experience problems and complications related to issues of race, and cautioned prospective transracially adopting parents to learn as much as possible about such matters prior to adopting.

Bagley's (1993a) longitudinal study of British Black and mixed race transracial adoptees also found favourable results. The initial study (Bagley & Young, 1979) compared the adjustment of 30 Black and mixed-race adopted children with 30 same-race Caucasian adopted children, 30 black and mixed race children who were in foster or group care, and 24 nonadopted children. The authors concluded from their investigation that transracial adoptees, then between six and eight years of age "had generally good psychological outcomes in terms of a number of standardized instruments of adjustment" (p. 289). The only concerning finding at this time, according to the racial identification measure used, was a tendency for Black children to identify themselves as White.

In the follow-up study, conducted approximately 12 years later, Bagley was able to locate 27 of the 30 transracial adoptees, and 25 of the same-race adoptees. Participants were administered a number of measures intended to assess self-esteem, self-image, identity integration, and general psychological adjustment. Bagley was particularly interested in whether earlier data collected on the adopted children would predict the outcomes of the young people when they were in their late teens. Results indicated that, without exception, they did not. None of the predictors – social status, age at adoption, parent's motive for adopting, attitudes of the parents toward Black culture and contact with Black friends, child's self-esteem, and ethnic identity were

related to the participant's present functioning. Furthermore, the clinical profiles of the two adopted groups were noted to be very similar, and did not appear to differ from what would be expected among the general population.

In a more recent study, Feigelman (2000) examined the responses of a large sample of transracial and inracial adoptive parents who provided information about their young adult children's experiences of racial discrimination, adjustment difficulties, and familial closeness. Feigelman acquired his sample through contacting the participants of two earlier surveys, though inexplicably did not report on or otherwise cite his previous research findings. His present sample consisted of 37 inracial White adoptive parents and three groups of transracial adoptive parents: Asian (N = 151), African-Americans (N = 33), and Latinos (N = 19). The mean age of all adoptees was 23, the majority of which, according to the author, were adopted at infancy.

Along with survey questions regarding social and familial experiences, Feigelman assessed problematic adjustment by having parents rate their adult children according to the Global Assessment Scale (GAS) and an index of "dysfunctionality" created by the author. Feigelman found that three-fourths of the adoptive parents reported being highly satisfied with their adoptions, with an equally high ratio (four-fifths) reporting warm and positive relationships with their adopted child. Curiously, Feigelman did not report inter-group comparisons regarding this finding, though did compare degree of adjustment difficulties among transracial and inracial adoptees, and found no significant differences. Distinctions were found, however, among the transracial adoptee subgroups. Compared to Asian and Latino transracial adoptive

parents, parents of African-American adoptees were more likely to report that their children had experienced incidents of racial discrimination and discomfort with their appearance. They also reported a greater number of adjustment difficulties among their children.

In general, increased experiences of racial discrimination among transracial adoptees were associated with greater incidents of adjustment difficulties. A related finding was that transracial adoptive children of parents who chose to live in predominantly white communities tended to experience more discomfort about their appearance than transracial adoptees raised in racially integrated communities. Discomfort in one's appearance was in turn associated with greater levels of maladjustment, which, although the author himself does not forward this proposition, would lead one to speculate that a compromised racial identity increases the transracially adopted child's vulnerability to various personal problems. Reviewed next is research that specifically examines the issue of racial identity formation among transracial adoptees.

In their longitudinal study of White middle-class American families (n = 88) who adopted African-American children as infants, Deberry et al. (1996) found evidence that parental attempts to racially socialize their children declined over time, though without a concomitant decrease in psychological adjustment. This decline in racial socialization was, however, correlated with a decrease in "Africentric Reference Group Orientation," a construct designed to measure racial awareness, attitudes, preferences, and understanding of African-American issues (DeBerry, 1991). It was found that Africentric Reference Group Orientation decreased over time

whereas Americentric Reference Group Orientation increased. The authors saw this as an indication that the predominating European-American culture was internalized and assimilated by the transracial adoptees because of minimally available Africentric values.

An important finding in this study was that family racial socialization was not significantly related to the adopted child's psychological adjustment. That is, it did not seem to matter whether or not parents actively promoted Black racial socialization; either way, the children ended up relatively well adjusted.

This was also the finding of McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, and Anderson (1982) who compared levels of self-esteem among Black children raised in either a White or a Black adoptive family. It was found that self-esteem scores for both groups were virtually identical and not significantly different from the mean of the norm population. Racial identity, on the other hand, was seen as more problematic for the transracially adopted Black children compared to the Black children adopted into Black families. Caution is warranted as to the generalization of these findings as the sample was not random and relatively small (n=30). McRoy et al. also found evidence that parental attitudes toward race influenced the child's identification toward their racial origins: "If the parents viewed the child as mixed or part White or if they tended to de-emphasize racial identity to the child, the child acquired similar perceptions...If the family acknowledged that racial identity was important and that their child was Black, the child, in turn, tended to define himself or herself as Black and to feel positive about that" (p. 525). McRoy et al. noted that the transracially adopted children were more likely to identify themselves as being adopted and to use

racial self-referents than were the inracially adopted children. It would seem that transracially adopted children are more conscious of their racial heritage and adoptive status because of the overt physical dissimilarities that differentiate them from their family and peers. As these researchers note, this will undoubtedly draw greater attention to the transracially adopted child who, unlike their inracially adopted counterparts, will more likely be called upon to explain his or her family situation.

A meta-analytic review of transracial adoption studies conducted by Hollingsworth (1997) specifically focused on issues of ethnic identity and self-esteem. Effect sizes were calculated for six studies which assessed racial identity and self-esteem among transracially adopted African-American and Mexican-American children. Overall, a moderate effect was found in a negative direction in relation to transracial/transethnic adoption and racial and ethnic identity. This was not the case, however, with self-esteem, which was not affected by adoption status.

Summary of Transracial Adoption Adjustment

It seems that the most salient feature of transracial adoption is not a poor psychological outcome per se, but a lack of racial identification, which in itself has not been linked to poor self-esteem or other emotional or behavioural problems. This finding is supported by writers (Friedlander, 1999; Taylor & Thorton, 1996) who assert that personal self-esteem and group identification are separate phenomena, such that it is possible for a person to have a strong sense of self-esteem, while lacking the ability to relate to mainstream society as a person of colour. There does, however, appear to be a relationship between racial discrimination, discomfort with appearance, and concomitant adjustment difficulties (Feigelman, 2000). Thus

although it may not be detrimental to a transracial adoptees' overall self-esteem if they identify primarily with their adoptive parents' culture and race, experiences of racism may still contribute to identity problems.

Whereas it is generally believed that for most racial groupings transracial adoption is a workable enterprise, in the case of Native North Americans there is much less clarity. Reviewed next are the only two studies of note that examine the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal families.

Aboriginal Transracial Adoption

Writers familiar with the issue of Aboriginal children raised in non-Aboriginal families are sensitive to apparent difficulties inherent to the situation. Homecomings for Aboriginal children raised in White urban families can be difficult if a child is unaccustomed to the culture of reservation life (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Ward, 1984). In the case of the transracial adoption of older Aboriginal children, problems may arise because the child's language and cultural norms are already established, whereby a mid-stream change from one culture to another may profoundly disrupt a child's sense of self (Ward, 1984). The apprehension of Aboriginal children from their families can be seen as producing a type of triple jeopardy whereby children lose their parents, their community, and a unique and familiar culture (Ward, 1984).

Furthermore, for children adopted at a later age, the years prior to adoption are often characterized by multiple foster care placements, which, in keeping with theories of attachment (Bowlby, 1980), can seriously effect a child's psychological adjustment. The tragic case of Richard Cardinal in the province of Alberta is sober testament to this reality. Prior to his death by suicide, Cardinal endured multiple

foster home placements, some of which were highly abusive, others of which simply did not extend the critically important care and love that a child needs to thrive emotionally and physically (Bagley, 1985).

As indicated in Chapter I, there are only two empirical studies of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families: Research by Fanshel (1972) which addressed this topic in the United states, and that of Bagley(1993b) who drew upon a Canadian sample of adoptive families.

Preceding Bagley by over twenty years, Fanshel (1972) sought to assess the overall adjustment of "Indian" children adopted in infancy by White, American parents. The start of Fanshel's research dates back to 1960, two years after the implementation of the Indian Adoption Project, an initiative designed to facilitate the adoption of "hard-to-place" Aboriginal Children in the United States and Canada. Fanshel worked closely with this project, drawing his sample of 98 adoptive parents from the 395 who had adopted through this initiative.

Fanshel's goal was to chart the infant adoptees' physical, emotional, behavioural, and familial progress over the course of five years. Structured interviews designed to assess a broad range of topics relevant to infant and child development were conducted on an annual basis. Fanshel used the interview data to categorize his families according to seven levels of adjustment ranging from "excellent" to "unpromising". He found that more than fifty percent of the children could be categorized as showing relatively problem-free adjustment, with none in, his view, fitting the "unpromising" ranking.

Interestingly, one question asked in the interviews was how the adoptive parents dealt with the "Indianness" of their children. Fanshel noted that while most parents did not seek out to adopt an Aboriginal child, the majority were comfortable with "Indian characteristics" and considered this a positive quality. Fanshel further noted, however, that almost half of his adult participants reported being stared at in public when out with their adopted children. Still, he maintained that the multi-racial composition of the families was not problematic, and that to the contrary, the families appeared to be very supportive of their children's cultural heritage:

> Further, many of the families began to take on a strong, positive interest in the Indian backgrounds of their children and planned to encourage their children's interest in their own backgrounds. While some families tended to play down this aspect, they were a distinct minority. Some parents went so far as to indicate that they hoped the children would return to the reservations some day and make a contribution to their people; others hoped to make trips with the children so that they might someday get related to the tribes from which they came. (p. 337)

Of course, Fanshel only followed the families until their adoptive children were age five or six, and thus as he noted, it would be premature to rule out future identity-based adjustment problems: "However, because of the young age of the children, it is still too early to determine how the children have integrated the information that they are of a different racial background of their parents" (p. 337). The other obvious concern with Fanshel's research is that it relied entirely upon the parents' subjective judgment of their children's psychological adjustment and did not

include other groups of children for comparison. Bagley's (1993b) research remedies both of these concerns.

Using data gathered from two previous studies, Bagley compared three groups of adolescents: Aboriginal children adopted by White parents; White children adopted by White parents; and children from a foreign country adopted by White parents. Also included were two non-adopted control groups, one consisting of nonadopted White children, the other, nonadopted Aboriginal children. Quantitative indices of self-esteem and suicidality were used as measures of adjustment. Results indicated that the Aboriginal adolescents living in White adoptive families were significantly more likely to have problems and difficulties. Two years after the study, half of the native adoptees had separated from their adoptive parents because of behavioural problems, emotional difficulty, or parent-child conflict. Furthermore, the Aboriginal children scored significantly lower on measures of self-esteem and were three times more likely than any other group to have expressed suicidal ideation or to have engaged in deliberate self-harm in the past six months.

What is telling in this study is that the non-adopted Aboriginal adolescents' adjustment scores did not significantly differ from the non-adopted Whites. Multiple regression analysis found that being Native and being adopted was the best predictor of low self-esteem. Interviews with adoptive parents discovered that even though ethnicity issues were perceived as problematic, there was little evidence of steps taken to address this. In both the Aboriginal adoptee group and the inter-country adoptee group, parents tended to overlook questions of identity while trying to treat the child as "just like one of us," a stance that may help explain the next finding.

Using a measure of "identity integration" developed by Weinreich (1979), Bagley found that half of the Native adoptees failed to integrate or respect their Aboriginal identity. Bagley infers from his findings that identity confusion plays a central role in the development of the behavioural problems that eventually lead to adoption placement breakdown. To help ameliorate identity confusion, Bagley recommends special support to help with the "role dilemma" of being an Aboriginal child in a White family. Bagley notes that the Aboriginal children who grew up on rural reserves where their cultural circumstances were congruent with their ethnic identity, did not suffer the identity confusion experienced by the Aboriginal children adopted by White families.

Bagley concludes that Aboriginal children adopted by White families have significantly poorer adjustment than White adoptees. Compared to White children adopted by White families and foreign children adopted by White families, the Aboriginal children adopted by White families had more problems of depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation, in addition to much higher levels of acting out behaviour. Though he states that the reason for this is unknown, Bagley implicates conflicts over ethnicity and identity as a causative factor.

Summary of Transracial Aboriginal Adoption

The results of Fanshel's early treatise on transracial Aboriginal adoption suggested generally favourable outcomes, though his findings are tempered by a lack of objective measures of adjustment, the absence of comparison groups, and the young age of the adopted children. Bagley's more recent research, which examined adolescent adoptees and used comparison groups along with objective outcome

measures, was much less optimistic. Unlike transracial adoption in general, which appears to at worst have a benign effect on the psychological adjustment of the adopted children, for transracially adopted Aboriginal children this practice engenders serious concern (Bagley, 1993b). Findings of lowered self-esteem, increased levels of depression and suicidal ideation, along with high rates of acting out behaviour, raises questions as to the merit of this form of adoption, and hence, the need for additional research. Bagley's (1993b) hypothesis is that the difficulties found among his adopted Aboriginal participants are due in part to issues related to racial and ethnic identity. Following a general critique of adoption research, I will then review identity theories that attempt to explain the development of racial identity, along with its psychological importance within a racialized society.

Critique of Adoption Research

Various sources of critique may be applied to adoption research, some of which are characteristic of quantitative research designs in general (e.g., small sample size, inadequately validated adjustment measures, and failure to employ comparison groups). Beyond these, two broader issues should be considered when evaluating the results of adoption adjustment studies.

First is the attrition of participants in longitudinally designed adoption studies. In most longitudinal studies, including the ones surveyed in this review, the number of participants decrease from one phase of research to the next, often it being the most troubled participants who drop out or cannot be located. One strategy used to address this concern involves contacting those who drop out to learn of their decision or inability to no longer participate. Such a procedure was not performed in the

longitudinal studies reviewed in the present research (Simon and Alstein, 1992; Deberry et al., 1996).

A second problem is the failure to consider the pre-adoption experiences of children prior to placement, which was the case in Bagley's (1993b) study of transracial Aboriginal adoptees. It is possible that the participants in this study were subject to any number of traumatic, neglectful, or abusive experiences prior to adoption, and that these experiences may have adversely affected the child's subsequent behavioural and emotional development.

Research that presents evidence of adjustment problems among adoptees, which has not controlled for pre-adoption experience, including prenatal and genetic variables, must be looked upon with discretion. It is well known that both early childhood experiences and the birth mother's prenatal experience may negatively impact a child's subsequent physical and psychological development. The effect of early childhood experiences has been documented in research that shows that a later age of adoption notably influences subsequent adjustment. For example, Sharma, McGue, and Benson (1996) found in their control group study of 4682 adopted children that as the age of adoption placement increased behavioural and emotional adjustment of participants decreased. Brodzinsky (1990) suggests that the possibility of prenatal factors influencing the development of adoptive children is increased due to the demographics of many women who give their child up for adoption: " Many of these complications are found among young, unwed mothers (e.g., poor nutrition, poor medical care, substance abuse, high levels of psychological stress, etc.) and since this group of women accounts for a sizable percentage of children placed for

adoption, it is reasonable to expect that prenatal and reproductive experiences may be important for explaining subsequent developmental problems among adoptees" (p. 16).

Trying to assess the relative influence of prenatal and reproductive experience on an adoptees' development is often a difficult enterprise. In many instances research accounts are not ecologically minded enough to account for the vicissitudes of one's life as lived, and as storied. Without such an appreciation, individual biology, deprived of its psychosocial [storied] context may be afforded more (or less) significance and influence in one's life-story than is necessarily warranted. The present research attempts to address this problem through presenting individual life-stories in a way that elucidates the various intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences that influence and contribute to the consequent adoption outcome. As Clandinin and Connelly (2002) note, "In narrative thinking, context is ever present. It includes such notions as temporal context, spatial context, and context of other people. Context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing" (p. 32).

Racial Identity Theory

Racial identity development is a commonly identified concern within the transracial adoption literature (Kirton, 2000; Fogg-Davis, 2002; Triseliotis, 1993). As already noted, the literature reviewed for the present research indicates that transracial adoptees, though on the whole enjoying psychological health, tend to identify with White cultural values rather than the values associated with their racial heritage. There is also evidence that increased incidence of racial discrimination among transracial adoptees is associated with increased incidence of adjustment difficulties

(Feigelman (2000). For opponents of transracial adoption, (Chestang, 1972; Chimezie, 1975) this creates a problem. How, they ask, can the transracial adoptee who does not identify with their cultural and racial heritage, protect him or herself from almost inevitable experiences of racism? Further to this, will the transracial adoptee develop a confused identity if he or she experiences rejection by the very culture (White) that serves as the basis for their identity?

The racial identity development models presented next have been created to explain the identity development of many racial groupings, including that of Euro-North American whiteness. All such modes are predicated on the assumption that racism continues to permeate North American society, and that this fact inevitably effects the process and outcome of interracial relationships at both an individual and institutional level (Sue, 1998).

Models of racial identity development typically involve a series of stages or statuses which invariably proceed from an unhealthy or negative racial identity to the development of a healthy, positive racial identity. For Whites, the development of a positive racial identity requires a person to become aware of their "whiteness", accept this aspect of their identity as socially meaningful, and ultimately internalize a realistic and positive view of whiteness not based on assumed superiority (Hardiman, 1979; Helms, 1995).

Minority racial identity development theories were first developed in the early 1970's through the work of Cross (1971) who created a theory of Black racial identity predicated upon theories of racial oppression. Cross' model charts the development of African-American racial identity proceeding from a status in which Blackness is

degraded and rejected, to a status in which Blackness is looked upon with pride and acceptance. Cross' model includes the following stages:

Preencounter: White culture is idealized, whereas Black culture and values are disparaged and relegated to an inferior status.

Encounter: Previously held taken-for-granted beliefs are questioned, along with the Black person's role within a dominant White power structure. The Black person becomes more accepting of his or her status within their racial group membership.

Immersion/Emersion: The Black person begins to reject White cultural standards and ideas and becomes intensely interested in Black culture.

Internalization: The Black person becomes comfortable and confident in their Black identity, and is now more accepting of nonBlack worldviews.

Commitment: Not only is the Black person fully accepting and confident in their Black identity, they now also display a long-term commitment to the causes of the Black community.

Cross' initial model has since undergone various revisions, both by himself and other authors (Cross, 1995; Helms 1995). As well, additional models of racial identity have been developed in service of various other racial groupings (e.g., Asian Identity development, Kim, 1981). Other models, such as Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1979) Minority Identity Development Model, and Helms' (1995) People of Colour Identity Statuses, have sought to develop generic models of racial identity pertinent to a wide range of people of colour and ethnic minorities. What is consistent

across these models is their emphasis on the development of a healthy racial identity despite living in a fundamentally racist, White North American society. As Sue (1998) notes in the case of African-Americans, being raised and socialized in a racist society may lead negative beliefs and stereotypes to become internalized, thereby decreasing self-esteem while increasing a desire to be White.

> The Black person comes to believe in his or her inferiority and may strive to "become White." Therefor, improving one's self-esteem and viewing the world in a realistic manner requires overcoming internalized societal racial stereotypes and the negative own-group conceptions embedded via the socialization process. (p. 70)

Thus the process of minority racial identity development, as presented by Atkinson et al. (1979) and Helms (1995), assumes that members of the said population at the outset revere the values of the dominant White culture, while holding negative feelings towards their own racial group. In order for an individual to achieve a positive racial identity he or she must first move through a succession of stages that inevitably involve dissonance, confusion, ambivalence, idealization of one's own group, and denigration of White culture. Once these stages have successfully been traversed, the individual is able to feel pride and acceptance towards their minority racial heritage while at the same time being open to building and sustaining relationships with the dominant White culture (Atkinson et al., 1979; Helms, 1995).

Though there are many theories of racial identity which cater to various racial minorities, to date, none have been designed expressly for transracial adoptees.

Perhaps the closest approximation are racial identity theories developed for biracial individuals, who share with their transracial adoptee counterparts a family context in which racially they perceive themselves as different from both parents. This, according to Herring (1995) and others (Hall, 2001; Poston, 1990), creates a situation in which forces within and external to the family pressure the biracial child to choose one racial identity over the other. Not surprisingly, this predicament is considered detrimental to the psychological adjustment of biracial children, a supposition supported by empirical studies. For example, evidence for a highly conflicted racial identity was found in Brown's (1995) study of 119 Black/White biracial young adults, age 18 to 35 years. This author found that consistent with a North American racial discourse which negates the possibility of a Black/White biracial identity, the majority of participants indicated Black as their racial category. There was, however, a difference in choice depending on whether it was publicly or privately conveyed; publicly participants were most likely to identify as Black, privately they were most likely to identify as interracial. Brown thus concluded, "The compartmentalization into public and private identities seemed to help the participants preserve their interracial self-perceptions while conforming to societal pressures to disregard their white roots" (p. 127). Brown further asserted that there is potential for conflict in whatever identity the biracial individual chooses, because biracial identities are contrary to societal prescriptions for racial identity.

Research summarized by Herring (1995) indicates that biracial individuals are vulnerable to a host of difficulties including gender confusion, self-hatred, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, delinquency, alienation, and denial of self. The assumption is

made that these difficulties arise because the socialization and developmental processes of biracial children is inherently more complex than mono-racial counterparts (Herring, 1995).

With the number of children born of mixed-racial parentage steadily increasing (Aladarondo, 2001; Hall, 2001), the need for racial identity theories that encompass the distinct sociocultural experience of these individuals became apparent. In contrast to monoracial models of racial identity models, biracial models tend to be less political and more developmental in their focus, charting the process of identity development from early childhood into adulthood. The two most prominent biracial identity models are Poston's (1990) five-stage model and Kerwin and Ponterotto's (1995) seven-stage model. Both of these models begin with an individual's growing understanding of race and ethnicity differences in childhood, followed by a pressure to choose one racial identity over the other, and ending with a biracial identity that incorporates aspects of both cultures. Though Poston's and Kerwin and Ponterotto's models are similar, the latter authors provide greater developmental specificity. Thus, their seven stages are as follows:

1. Preschool stage: Biracial children become cognizant of racial and ethnic differences. This realization occurs sooner among biracial children because of their early exposure to children of different racial groups.
2. Entry to school: biracial children are increasingly questioned by their peers because of their often ambiguous racial presentation.
3. Preadolescence: Biracial children acquire a heightened sensitivity to differences based on physical appearance and other characteristics such as language and

culture. Most biracial children will have an awareness of the differences between their two parents at this stage.

4. Adolescence: Biracial adolescents experience distress at feeling external pressure to choose one racial group over another.
5. College/young adulthood: At this age, young biracial adults tend to identify primarily with one culture, though there is a tendency to reject other's expectations for a singular racial identity and begin moving towards an appreciation of their multiple heritages.
6. Adulthood: At this last stage (which can continue on indefinitely) biracial individuals continue to integrate disparate aspects of their own background to form a more integrated and complete racial identity. The attainment of this stage is predicated on the successful resolution of the earlier stages.

Given that the central aspect of racial identity theory is the development of a positive racial identity within an ostensibly racist society, and given that those leery of transracial adoption are concerned with this very notion, it is surprising that the two literatures do not intersect. Racial identity development theories, promoted by the likes of Cross (1971,1995), Atkinson et al. (1979), Helms (1995), Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) figure most prominently within the multicultural counselling literature. Here they are enlisted to help decrease racism among mental health professionals while at the same time facilitating therapeutic intervention through assessing a minority client's racial identity status (McDougall & Arthur, 2001; Parker, 1998). In contrast, when racial identity is addressed in the transracial adoption literature, it is done so for the most part irrespective of the racial identity literature,

and instead tends to look upon racial identity as a static, present-absent variable that is categorizeable and measurable by the degree to which an adoptee interacts with members of his or her racial group and is comfortable with his or her racial appearance (DeBerry et al., 1996). Herein, there seems to be no attempt to apply racial identity theory to the experience of transracial adoptees, as explicated by the empirical literature. Do transracial adoptees proceed through the identity statuses as suggested by the proponents of such theories (e.g., Cross, 1971,1995; Atkinson et al., 1979; Helms, 1995; Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995)? In general, is there an identifiable pattern through which transracial adoptees develop their racial identity?

Though these questions remain unasked, and hence, unanswered, there are even more fundamental questions that are being raised by theorists of race and identity. Indeed, the view that concepts such as race and identity represent fixed, homogenous, categorizeable and measurable entities is increasingly criticized by postmodern theorists who question the meaningfulness and applicability of such notions to peoples' actual life experiences (Gergen, 1991; Kirton, 2000; Luke & Luke, 1999; Parry & Doan, 1994; White & Epston, 1990). Reviewed next are emergent theories of identity which draw upon alternative metaphors to explicate race and personal identity, and which are more amenable to a postmodern worldview.

Emergent Theories of Race and Identity

The various racial identity theories presented thus far, including those which address biracial situations, rely heavily upon the belief that concepts such as race and self represent essential truths which correspond to a context-free independent reality. Such "essentialist" views have been questioned by authors who subscribe to a

postmodern epistemology that emphasizes the discursive and social constructionist nature of knowledge (Gergen, 1991; Kirton, 2000). Theorists concerned with the problem of essentialized notions of self and race have turned to two metaphors in particular (narrative and diaspora), to better account for such concepts. Diaspora and narrative, share an affinity with a postmodern agenda, which, with its emphasis on deconstructing texts and the constitutive role of language, interrogates the notion of an autonomous centred subject (Kirton, 2000). Accordingly, a postmodernist critique takes to task the notion of homogenized, static views of self and race in which a relatively fixed core of meaning provides the basis for identification and authenticity (Kirton, 2000).

Narrative Identity

To address the narrative metaphor first, many writers disenchanted with modernist notions of self and identity, and who fervently deconstruct such notions, turn to narrative as a remedy (Gergen, 1991; Kerby, 1991; Parry & Doan, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1991; White & Epston, 1990). These authors believe that the features of narrative are well suited to address the problem of a singular, unified, and authentic identity. For Kerby (1991) the difference between essentialized notions of identity and their narrative counterpart, is the difference between asking "What are you?" versus "Who are you?" the former configuring the self as a more or less static collection of categorizeable personal attributes, the latter, a solicitation for story (Kerby, 1991).

Herein, language, and more specifically the act of storying, is granted greater function than that of mere information transmission, it is according to many writers

(Carr, 1986; Gergen, 1991; Kerby, 1991, Polkinghorne, 1991; White & Epston, 1990) constitutive of personal identity, which is to say that depending on the stories we tell of our lives, we live accordingly. Carr (1986) explains,

> Narration in our sense is constitutive not only of action and experience but also of the self which acts and experiences. Rather than a merely temporally persisting substance which underlies and supports the changing effects of time, like a thing in relation to its properties, I am the subject of a life-story which is constantly being told and retold in the process of being lived. I am also the principal teller of this tale, and belong as well to the audience to which it is told. (p.126)

The stories we tell of our lives, far from being benign, are consequential to the ongoing development and persistence of a personal identity. As Polkinghorne (1991) notes, "These are stories about the self. They are the basis of personal identity and self-understanding and they provide answers to the question "Who am I?" (p. 136).

Traditional conceptualizations of self, which most often encompass purported internal entities (acorn, onion, stream, an actor) or a collection of nouns and adjectives (clerk, father, short, Canadian) are, according to Norwine (1993), rendered superfluous when the narrative metaphor is applied to the concept of personal identity.

> The self, like everything else, is now seen as absolutely contingent or unnecessary. Pursuing meaning (so to speak) via this postmodern tao is thus a very brave undertaking, for it requires making what we will of our own

> "texts," becoming "strong poets" who celebrate ourselves as happenstance children of chance and time. (p. 101)

Thus according to Norwine, personal identity is not adequately informed by categorizeable traits or qualities, but rather, is "contingent" upon the stories we tell of our lives, and hence, the manner in which we interpret our experience. However, it is not enough to simply assert claims about one self. If personal identity is constituted by the stories we tell of our lives, such accounts must necessarily be actualized through their performance (Kerby, 1991; Gergen, 1991; White and Epston, 1990). This identity-informing performance is, as Carr (1986) notes, a function of reflected-upon relationships, wherein identity is "constituted in interpersonal transaction as well as intrapersonal reflection. It is one thing to speak of the social construction of the self, however, and another to inquire into the make-up of social entities as such" (p. 126).

The experience of an enduring self through time is a central constituent of narrative identity. The nature of storying necessarily implies a temporally situated self whereby a unified identity is dependent on the continuity and coherence of our life story through the past, present, and implied future (Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kerby, 1991; Polkinghorne 1991). Experiences of angst and despair are thought to be symptomatic of a diminished sense of narrative continuity and coherence, wherein "One's personal plot can no longer hold together one's life events nor produce a unified and integrated experience of self" (Polkinghorne, 1991; p. 151). The importance of connectedness over time is reflected in the premonitory writing of Erik Erikson (1964), who advised that "The key problem of identity, then, is, (as the

term connotes) the capacity of the ego to sustain sameness and continuity in the face of changing fate" (p. 96-97). The act of self-narration, as its proponents argue, affords the best explanation of how Erikson's "key problem" is resolved. Chandler and Lalonde (1995) note that the achievement of self-continuity is "a fundamentally narrative enterprise that, rather than regarding 'now' as the inescapable effect of a determinant and causal "then," undertakes to imaginatively re-read one's past in the light of the present, all in a struggle to give one's life some contemporary interpretative meaning" (p. 28).

If the experience of a continuous and coherent identity is a function of narrative, it must also be a function of memory. Recalling the stories of our past is fundamental to achieving an identity which persists over time (Chandler & LaLonde, 1995; Kerby, 1991). According to Polkinghorne (1991) recollections become schematically organized according to narrative structures which unify life events according to emplotted episodes. Kerby (1991) similarly notes that:

> When a past state of affairs is reflected upon, a degree of emplotment is enacted. What this emplotment does is turn occurrences, discrete events or images, into moments in a narrative composition, and it is, I content, this narrative structuration that most effectively generates our understanding of the past. (p. 28)

In this sense, the meaning of life events may be regarded as being conferred retroactively (Freeman, 1993). Until a narrative interpretation is applied to an event or action, it's significance or meaning remains unknown (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In keeping with a text analogy, and the revisionist process it implies, rather than

mirroring a one-to-one representation of historical experience, self-narrating is thus inescapably an interpretative activity (Chandler & Lalonde, 1995; Cohler, 1982; Kerby 1991; Polkinghorne, 1991; Sarbin, 1986). Such interpretations reflect both the degree to which personal agency is implicated in the creation of one's identity, and the constraints that are levied by the forces of social discourse (Gergen, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1991). The influence of social discourse on the fashioning of individual stories might therefore be inferred according to the degree and manner in which one appears to live according to them (Kerby, 1991). Indeed the constitution of our social biosphere with its many subversive and ideologically driven discourses assumes a central role in the shaping of our narratives and, hence our individual and collective identities. Kerby (1991) suggests that becoming aware of these discursive influences is key to our liberation from them:

> Much of our self-narrating is a matter of becoming conscious of the narratives that we already live with and in – for example our family and the broader sociopolitical arena. It seems true to say that we have already been narrated from a third-person perspective prior to our even gaining the competence for self-narration. Such external narratives will understandably set up expectations and constraints on our personal self-descriptions, and they significantly contribute to the material from which our own narratives are derived." (p. 6)

Thus, although authors such as Gergen (1991) may promote the idea of a "pastiche personality" by which individuals can borrow "bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available" (p. 150), stories of self – especially for those

who have not reached adulthood (Kerby, 1991) may well be constrained by the cultural stories and the real-life impediment they give rise to. Transcending such restraints, as noted by Kerby above, requires mindfulness of the narratives one lives by, such that one might free themselves from the "specifications of personhood" emplotted within their story (Parry & Doan, 1994). Reviewed next is the idea of diasporic identity, which with its derision towards reified notions of race and self, attempts to undermine the identity confinements levied by racist social discourse.

Diasporic Identity

The advancement of narrative as a root metaphor for individual identity is in many ways compatible with the notion of diasporic identity, which similarly is intended by its proponents to supplant essentialist concepts of identity (Kirton, 2000; Luke & Luke, 1999).

As already noted, the notion of race as a scientifically based concept has largely been discarded (Kerwash, 1997; Kirton, 2000). This is not to say, however, that race is no longer socially significant for those whose racial markers identify them as other than White, but that the construct of race is clearly a social construction and one that is built and sustained by ideology, rather than biology (Kerwash, 1997; Kirton, 2000; Luke & Luke, 1999; Sue, 1998). Despite this, society's tendency to categorize people according to binary and hierarchical individual differences continues to trivialize and detract from the complexity of racial and ethnic identity (Kirton, 2000). Thus authors such as Kirton (1999) and Luke and Luke (2000) assert the need for alternative conceptualizations of identity more representative of persons whose identities are continually jostled by the social imposition of racial categories.

Success in this regard, would help facilitate what Fogg-Davis (2002) refers to as "racial navigation". The central idea of racial navigation proposes that despite its continued and hindering presence, racial categorization may well be transcended in a very real and meaningful way through a process of creative self-fashioning. In this way self-understanding is not "grounded in the passive acquisition of race…" but through a "dynamic process that actively cultivates a personalized racial self-concept" (Fogg-Davis, 2002; p. 32). It is in this spirit that the notion of diasporic identity reveals – and acquires – its merit.

The term diaspora whose literal meaning refers to the "dispersion of seeds beyond the area where they originated" is used by anthropologists to describe situations where large groupings of people retain their cultural identity despite geographical displacement (Kohl, 1992). In contemporary racial theorizing, the term diaspora is increasingly used to describe individual identities which are not easily accounted for by singularly defined categories of racial or ethnic group membership (Kirton, 2000). A diasporic identity is not bound by such essentialist representations of self and race, but rather strives to negate such representations by capturing the "complexity and local specificity" of race in ways that conventional understandings cannot (Luke & Luke, 1999; p. 234). To this end, a diasporic identity resembles Gergen's (1991) post-modern articulation of identity with its disloyalty towards reified notions of self: "There is no individual essence to which one remains true or committed. One's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and directed as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships. In the case of "Who am I" it is a teeming world of provisional possibilities" (p. 139). In similar fashion Luke and

Luke (1999), assert that "The diasporic identity is never stable or fixed or even predictable but in a constant state of immanent and permanent morphology. That morphology is at work in the interweaving of place-bound discourses and practices around, for instance, gender, culture, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion" (p. 229).

It is in this regard that diasporic and narrative conceptualizations of identity display their compatibility, inasmuch as both are regarded as self-ascribed and self-constituting identities, created and made intelligible by the available discourse repertoires which bring shape to self-other relationships.

> We can view the diasporic subject as a constituted and self-constituting social identity in a cultural space, which is always semiotic and open to a multiplicity of articulations and interpretations of difference that emerge out of overlapping discourses of difference and commonality (of ethnicity, race, culture, gender, sexuality, nationalism, class, and so forth). The element of self-constitution is an inherently relational process of being marked and marking one's self; of being differentiated and differentiating one's self; and on constructing one's own meanings, identifications, and social relations in specific places (families communities), and within specific fields of power relations (political, gendered, economic, religious, cultural). (Luke & Luke, 1999; p. 229)

Although the concept of diasporic identity acknowledges the continued presence and social significance of racial categories it does not require any form of commitment to them, other than for utilitarian reasons, such as political advocacy

through group solidarity (Fogg-Davis, 2002). Rather, in keeping with a narrative configuration of identity, who we are is more so informed by the stories we come to tell of such social phenomena and how we position ourselves relative to them. As Kirton (2000) notes, "Central to understandings of identity is the question of positionality" (p. 97), that is, the position of the individual relative to family, community, and wider social forces whose discursive practices have real effects on the lives of individuals, both in terms of day-to-day experience and the stock of stories that are available to bring intelligibility to one's experience.

The ability to position our selves relative to a racialized society, or as Fogg-Davis (2002) asserts, the ability to participate in racial navigation, is central to the notion of a diasporic identity, comfortable as it is with ambivalence and uncertainty, promoting as it does the creative act of self-construction.

In many respects the idea of "passing", that is, the act of deliberately trying to take on the identity of another (often for the purpose of escaping various forms of stigmatization or oppression) is compatible with the notion of diasporic identities. As Ginsberg (1996) notes, "Passing is about identities: their creation imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties" (p. 2). Passing, according to Cutter (1996), has the potential to both expose and undermine essentialist formulations of race and identity, in that for those who take on such projects, "Meaning cannot be stabilized, fixed, confined, limited; and 'passing' becomes the ultimate mechanism for creating a text that refuses to be contained, consumed, or reduced to a unitary meaning" (p. 76). Passing, then, is construed as a

self-initiated and self-directed exercise in identity construction – similar in character to the insurgent quality which so defines the diasporic identity.

Purpose of the Research

Through this literature review I have come to recognize, as have others (Bagley, 1993b), that at present there is no systematic Canadian research that examines the psychosocial experience of Aboriginal children raised by nonAboriginal parents. Research which examines other transracial parenting situations is more abundant, but this literature is not suitably generalized to issues concerning the Canadian Aboriginal context. Herein, the paucity of research leaves many questions unanswered. For example, how might we make sense of the poor outcomes noted among the Aboriginal transracial adoptees in Bagley's (1993b) research? Did identity problems (as Bagley suggests) contribute to his participants' difficult experiences? If so, what is the nature of such problems, how do they develop, and how are they eventually resolved? The purpose of this research is to bring greater understanding to such questions through providing in-depth, richly described, narrative accounts of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families, as described retrospectively by adult Aboriginal participants.

CHAPTER 3

Narrative Inquiry

Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people. This is the contribution of qualitative research...

Valerie J. Janesick

Narrative inquiry was chosen to bring greater understanding to the experiences of Aboriginal adults who were raised in non-Aboriginal families. The theoretical and procedural foundations of this research follows the traditions set forth by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in education, and Polkinghorne (1995) and Sarbin (1986) in psychology. Before discussing the characteristics of narrative inquiry and my reason for choosing it, I will first briefly describe generic characteristics of qualitative research, within which narrative is subsumed.

The hallmark of qualitative research is the production of richly described holistic accounts of lived experience (Janesick, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). It is looked upon as a type of naturalistic inquiry which explores real life situations without trying to manipulate or control the unfolding of events (Patton, 1990). In qualitative research there is openness to the phenomena being investigated: whatever emerges is accepted, what "should" happen is not predicted in advance. Qualitative research seeks to expose the fortuitous, unique, and idiosyncratic aspects of human behaviour, and discover within them rich and meaningful information (Smith, 1983).

There are many approaches to qualitative research, with no single method having claim to the "right way." The method that is chosen is informed by the research question one asks in conjunction with the information one wishes to generate (Janesick, 1994). In my case, I ask the question (p.11), What are the life-stories of Aboriginal adults who were raised in nonAboriginal families? I want to know how Aboriginal adults raised in non-Aboriginal families make sense of this experience through the personal stories they tell. As for the information I seek to generate, my intention is to produce richly described stories that pull the reader into the experience of being raised in a family of different cultural and racial origin. My desire is for the reader to be captured by the stories in such a way that an intimate and informative connection is made with the lives of the participants. It is my belief that a narrative inquiry can achieve this end.

Features of Narrative Inquiry

The study of human behaviour needs to include the study of human meaning systems, and human meaning systems cannot exist without narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative inquiry refers both to the process of constructing a story and the result of this process. It is, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) attest, both the "phenomena under study *and* [original italics] method of study" (p. 4). Herein, the terms "story" and "narrative" are used interchangeably to refer to the outcome of the narration process (Polkinghorne,1995). It is said by many authors (Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gergen, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986; White and Epston, 1990) that narrative reflects the natural way in which human beings bring meaning and understanding to their lived experience.

According to Polkinghorne (1988), stories of experience are what "people or groups use to understand the temporal connections between the events they have experienced and to account for their own and others' motives, reasons, expectations, and memories" (p. 170). The quality of temporality is fundamental to the meaning making process. As Polkinghorne (1988) explains, "narrative ordering makes individual events comprehensible by identifying the whole to which they contribute. The ordering process operates by linking diverse happenings along a temporal dimension and by identifying the effect one event has on another" (p. 18).

Thus, people's stories of experience tell not only of past action, but also of how meaning and understanding are ascribed to those actions across time (Reissman, 1993). Narrative inquiry attempts to capture the temporal dimension of experience through displaying how people order and construct life events to arrive at a coherent and organized account of who they are and what they have experienced (Polkinghorne, 1995). The results of such an inquiry do not have claim to certainty, but to "likelihood" (Polkinghorne, 1988). Whereas the logico-scientific approach to understanding human experience uses reasoned arguments built upon formal mathematical descriptions and systematic categorization to produce increasingly "truthful" theories, narrative seeks to bring "lifelikeness" to experience through the production of "good stories" and "believable" historical accounts (Bruner, 1986). Narrative inquiry is interested in the nuances of human experience and deals with intentions and their consequences (Polkinghorne, 1995). Those who use this approach understand the indeterminacy of the stories that are told, and as Bruner (1986) reminds us, that there will always be "varying perspectives that can be constructed to

make experience comprehensible" (p. 37). For any given life experience there may be numerous interpretations, and through each interpretation some meanings will be censored, while others are accentuated. Certain approaches to therapy (White & Epston, 1990) capitalize on this unique feature of narrative through helping clients to re-story (re-interpret) their experience in ways that lead to more preferred ways of living. Self-narratives bring consistency and coherence to our past experiences, and depending on how we come to interpret these experiences, we live accordingly in the present (Carr, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995; White & Epston, 1990).

In this sense, meaning is said to be conferred upon experience retroactively (Polkinghorne, 1988). That is, life, as lived moment to moment, lacks fullness of meaning until it has been storied. Freeman (1993) explains this proposition:

> Life itself, therefore, rather than being the yardstick against which to measure the truth or falsity of narrative, could in a certain sense be untrue in its own right, such that only the passage of time could determine its meanings. Narratives, in turn, rather than being the mere fictions they are sometimes assumed to be, might instead be in the service of attaining exactly those forms of truth that are unavailable in the flux of the immediate. (p. 224)

Accordingly, we attach meaning and significance to our life experiences not as they are lived, but after the fact. This process does not represent a one-to-one correspondence between experience and our recollection of it. The constructive nature of memory, the role of social context in which a story is told, and the normative cultural discourses we have available to us, all shape the story that is told. Cohler (1982) explains,

> As is true with other forms of memorial activity, reminiscence does not represent events in the past in a manner which is isomorphic with the manner in which these events had actually taken place. Reminiscence represents memory, transformed over time, in the context of a social milieu, including both prevailing concepts of the life course itself and more-or-less expectable role transitions and normative and eruptive life events. (p. 212)

As with the stories that an individual tells and lives by in everyday life, the stories told in research interviews are a product of (and hence, influenced by) the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space: person, place, and time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is for this reason that narrative theorists emphasize the relativity of narrative and its social constructionist nature (Gergen, 1991). As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert, narrative inquiry is by nature a collaborative and co-constructive endeavour. It is not a case of detached, arms-length, objective inquiry. The researcher's presence in the investigative relationship is not considered benign; attempts are not made to deny his or her influence upon the narrative that emerges through conversation. Rather, it is acknowledged that all parties to the research endeavour possess and contribute a voice to the construction of meaning: "as researchers, we become part of the process. The two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5).

The Choice of Narrative Inquiry

Those who write about qualitative research emphasize its holistic nature, that is, its ability to provide richly described and integrated accounts of lived

experience (Janesick, 1994). Despite its inherent strengths, the fruits of qualitative research do not always live up to its potential. Carefully designed interviews are carried out and then scrupulously transcribed, only to be subsequently squandered through the analysis process. As Kvale (1996) notes, the essential features of narrative are often left unrecognizable after analysis has ended: "The subject's often exciting stories have – through the analyzing and reporting stages – been butchered into atomistic quotes and isolated variables" (p. 254). The splintering of once-meaningful accounts of experience into categories (be they thematic or otherwise) conceals the identity of the participant and loses the essential features of narrative. Conversely, "When participants are known intimately as people, not merely as categorical representatives, categories fragment" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 141). Organizing textual data according to categories reconfigures text as descriptive rather than, as is the case with narrative inquiry, explanatory. Narrative and categorical forms of data represent two distinct epistemologies which produce two very different kinds of information. Polkinghorne (1988) writes:

> If a person is asked why they have done something, the account is normally given in the narrative mode rather than in the categorical mode. To the question "Why did he purchase life insurance?" the answer in a categorical explanation is "Because he is a White male, in the 40-to-50 age category, and those in this category are in 70 percent of cases, also in the category of people who buy life insurance." The narrative explanation, however, answers such a question by configuring a set of events into a story-like causal nexus. The temporal explanation of why one does something focuses on the events in an

individual's life history that have an effect on a particular action, including the projected future goals the action is to achieve. (p. 21)

The appeal of narrative inquiry lies in its ability to preserve intact the richly described texts of human experience. Stories presented this way reveal the development of identities, situated as they are, within the temporal, relational, and positional contexts of living (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Bruner (1986) writes, "narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intention" (p. 16) and by doing so explicates the meaning of personal experience in ways that using other methods would not be possible. Hence, my reason for choosing a narrative approach for this research.

Participants

The participants in this study were three adult females and one adult male. All were of mid-range socioeconomic status, and all identified as being of Aboriginal descent. My first participant, Pam[5], was forty-five years of age at the time of her participation. Pam heard about this research from a friend who in turn had heard about it from my second participant, Calvin. Pam was fostered into a nonAboriginal family at age three and lived with this family until she left home at age sixteen. Initially I intended to limit the focus of this research to Aboriginal adoptees, though

[5] Pseudonyms are used for all participants and all the individuals named in their stories.

upon meeting Pam and hearing her profound story of being raised in a long-term, nonAboriginal foster home, I decided to make an exception[6]. At present, Pam has her own accounting business, though also has a diploma in engineering and is looking to obtain a Masters degree in this field of study. My second participant, Calvin, was twenty-eight years of age at the time of his participation. I met Calvin at a youth violence conference. Calvin was part of a panel discussion that looked at this topic among Aboriginal communities. When it came his turn to speak, Calvin stood up and told his story of having been raised in a White adoptive family from infancy. It was a powerful story that cumulated in the taking of another man's life. Following the presentation, I approached Calvin, thanked him for sharing his profound and very personal story, and asked if he would like to participate in the research I was conducting. Calvin indicated an interest, and said he would also pass my name on to other potential participants. Calvin was adopted into a nonAboriginal family when he was two weeks old and lived with this family until age twenty-one. Calvin has a

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[6] It is acknowledged that there are significant differences in psychological development between adopted children and children who are raised in long-term foster placements. These differences, which have been documented in the adoption and fostering literature, stress the detrimental effects that impermanence can have on the foster child's developing psyche (Triseliotis, 2002). Being raised in a family context in which the decision to terminate placement can be made by any of three involved parties (social worker, foster family, biological family) is an unpredictable and uncertain predicament. According to Triseliotis (2002) this situation can engender longstanding feelings of insecurity and anxiety for the children involved. Unlike their adopted counterparts, long-term foster children have been shown to lack a secure sense of belonging to their substitute caregivers (Triseliotis & Hill 1990). Children in long-term foster placements often experience feelings of ambiguity and difference, which in turn leads to feelings of being unwanted and replaceable (Triseliotis, 2002). Placement disruption rates between 38% and 57 % within traditional foster care, suggest a realistic basis for the child's apprehension that their placement might not endure (Smith, 2001). The sequelae of mistreatment which often accompany the foster child into their new home, including feelings of rejection, lowered self-esteem, mistrust, and resentment, only increase the probability of placement breakdown (Marcus, 1991). Compounding the situation is the finding that when difficulties do arise, adoptive parents are more likely to persevere than their foster parent counterparts (Howe, 1996). Ideally long-term foster children would eventually be adopted by their foster families, though this has been found to occur in only about 13 percent of occasions (Triseliotis, 2002).

Bachelors degree and works in the area of cultural diversity. My third participant, Karen, was thirty-five years of age at the time of her participation. I met Karen through our mutual employment at a residential treatment centre for youth. Karen was adopted into a nonAboriginal family when she was six months old. She lived with this family through to adulthood, though competitive sports meant that by age fifteen she was often away from home for extended periods of time. Karen has a diploma in social work and currently works as a ski instructor, fitness instructor, and child and youth care counsellor. My final participant, Autumn, was forty years of age at the time of her participation. Autumn learned of my research through an advertisement I had placed on a university bulletin board. Autumn was fostered into a nonAboriginal family at age three, and then adopted by a nonAboriginal family at age four, where she lived until age eighteen. Autumn is currently completing her doctorate in social work, and has applied to law school.

The specific criteria for including participants in this research were as follows:

1) Through initial contact and conversation it was apparent that the participant would be able to articulate a rich and coherent description of their experience.
2) The participant was raised in a nonAboriginal family from early childhood to the time they left home.
3) The participant self-identifies as being of Aboriginal ancestry.
4) The participant is over the age of 21.

The aforementioned sampling design is "purposive" in that participants were specifically chosen for their ability to elucidate the subject matter being explored (Patton, 1990). As is the case with all qualitative sampling designs, purposive

sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling. This type of sampling requires the researcher to collect the most insightful information possible through the selection of knowledgeable and willing participants (Morse, 1986).

In narrative research, findings can be used as a collection of cases from which understanding moves from case to case, rather from case to general knowledge claim (Polkinghorne, 1995). The value inherent in this position is alluded to by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who write, "It is the particular and not the general that triggers emotion and gives rise to...authenticity" (p. 8). Narrative cases lend meaning to new instances of experience not through generalization but through analogy:

> The collection of stories is searched to find one that is similar in some respect to a new one. The concern is not to identify the new episode as an instance of general type but as similar to a specific remembered episode. The new episode is noted as similar to, but not the same as the previous selected episode. Thus the understanding of the new action can draw upon previous understanding while being open to the specific and unique elements that make the new action different from all that have gone before. (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11)

What is important in narrative inquiry is the choosing of information-rich cases which best illustrate the subject matter under investigation. Often in narrative inquiry a collection of cases related to the same topic are included for the purpose of "creating a set of profiles or vignettes that, alongside each other, provide greater insight and understanding than any single vignette" (Polkinghorne, 1995). Accordingly, this research is a collection of four stories, all of the same subject

matter, though within the variability of individual experience, narratively configured in different ways.

Story Collection

In qualitative research there are many research strategies one may choose, each with their own observance for what may serve as data (Morse, 1994). In narrative inquiry, data, also referred by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as "field texts", can take many forms, including, but not limited to, journal writing; letters; autobiographical writing; field notes; conversation; research interviews; family stories; documents; and photographs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Data for this research was collected through audio-taped unstructured interviews, conducted by myself and lasting from forty-five minutes to an hour-and-a-half. I interviewed my first participant, Pam, four times. All of the interviews occurred in a meeting room at a community agency where I worked at the time. I interviewed my second participant, Calvin, three times. The first interview took place at his work office, the following two at a Calgary coffee shop. My third participant, Karen was also interviewed three times. The first interview took place at my work office, the subsequent two at her home. My last participant, Autumn, was interviewed four times, each time at her home. Karen, Autumn, and Pam all shared photographs, which, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, help to trigger memories around which certain stories can be constructed. Autumn also shared personal writings that came to her following one of the interviews.

Before beginning the interview process, I described to each participant the purpose of the research, how it was to be conducted, and the rights that accompany

their involvement. In addition, each participant read and signed an informed consent form (Appendix A). Determining when sufficient information had been collected to end the interview process and begin writing the stories was made through a mutual decision based on a shared sense that there was little more that could be said to explain the experience under question. As is common during the analysis stage of narrative inquiry, gaps within the story lines did become evident. Conducting follow-up interviews allowed me fill in these gaps, while at the same time allowing participants to verify the degree of correspondence between the written story and their recollected experiences.

Narrative Analysis

According to Riessman (1993), narrative analysis seeks to display how individuals construct meaning out of their experience. The beginning point to this end is the collection of stories that are informing of the research question asked. Once this task has been completed, the researcher is typically left with a huge amount of information, which rather than being separated into its "constituent parts" needs to be synthesized into a coherent developmental account (Polkinghorne, 1995).

This process, according to Polkinghorne (1995), proceeds by way of a synthesis that configures events and action in the form of a plot, wherein plot refers to "the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship among the events and choices of their lives" (p. 7). It is the task of narrative analysis to transform the "raw" textual data of narrative inquiry into a more general life story that brings unified meaning to the self-identity of the narrator

(Polkinghorne, 1988). The basic steps of narrative analysis outlined by Polkinghorne include:

1) Transcribe verbatim the audio-recorded interview data
2) Arrange the data elements chronologically
3) Identify which elements are contributors to the outcome
4) Look for connections of cause and influence among the events
5) Write the story

The analytic process that I carried out essentially follows Polkinghorne's thoughts, though in practice was much more involved and did not follow the clean, stepwise fashion that his description suggests. Here in detail, are the steps that I undertook.

1. Each audio-taped interview was transcribed by myself and sent back to the participant for verification of accuracy.
2. Once a participant's interviews were complete, the transcribed text was read through thoroughly. Text pertinent to the storied experience of being raised in a nonAboriginal family was highlighted.
3. The transcription was read through a second time. This time notes were made beside each portion of highlighted text indicating what element of the story the text pertained to, that is, to the participant's relationship with his or her adoptive or foster family, biological family, traditional culture, or community.
4. A Microsoft Word document was created entitled "Key Elements of Story." Here, as the title suggests, all of the key elements thought to be essential to the story's plot line were written out in chronological order.

5. A second document was created entitled "Story Outline". Here the key elements in the previous document were configured into a sketched story line running from beginning to end.
6. In chronological order, the story line was then "filled in" through pasting text quotations[7] and adding supportive and supplementary text. This resulted in a rough, beginning-to-end narrative.
7. The rough narrative then underwent a process of multiple revisions as transcriptions were reread, meaning refined, and edits made.
8. At this point, the completed story was sent back to the participant for verification of meaning and historical detail. Further revisions were made according to the participant's comments.

Trustworthiness

According to Mishler (1990), trustworthiness is about producing qualitative research findings that are accepted by other researchers and considered useful to their own theorizing and fields of inquiry. To achieve this degree of trustworthiness, it is necessary to attend to issues of subjectivity and bias. In qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument. As Janesick (1994) notes, qualitative research is ideologically driven insofar as personal values and biases will always be present in the work. Because of this, the qualitative researcher strives for transparency in his or her work. It is expected that enough of the person-of-the-researcher will be revealed so that one can see how the questions that guide the inquiry have been crafted (Janesick, 1994). This feature of qualitative research is juxtaposed with another

[7] In a few instances the content of direct quotations was slightly altered so as to help insure anonymity.

notable feature, that of neutrality. Credible research, be it of any sort, is associated with a stance of neutrality. Achieving (or trying to achieve) neutrality in quantitative research designs requires the researcher to observe the well-established rules of scientific protocol. To do otherwise may introduce "experimenter bias" into the study, which apart from diminishing the researcher's credibility within the scientific community, also jeopardizes the study's scientific standing. Qualitative research cannot employ the same bias-checking strategies used in quantitative research. Rather than call upon "design rules" to help control for bias, as is the case with quantitative research, qualitative research promotes transparency by making visible the researcher's biases at the outset. Thus in my research, prior to sharing the participants' stories I have included a sketch of my own story, a story that reflects my personal involvement with my topic, both historically and at present.

Taking measures to reveal the procedural steps of this inquiry along with the identity of the researcher adds to the overall trustworthiness of this project. There is also a need, however, to judge the adequacy of the narrative analysis, that is, the degree to which the analysis has led to the production of believable and useful accounts of experience. Herein, Reissman (1993) has outlined four criteria upon which to judge this matter:

1) Persuasiveness: The extent to which the interpretation is reasonable, convincing, and supported through evidence from the informants' accounts.
2) Correspondence: The extent to which the results are recognizable as adequate when handed back to the participants from whom the data was originally collected (also referred to as member checks).

3) Coherence: The extent to which thick description ties together the overall goal the narrator is trying to accomplish by speaking.

4) Pragmatic Use: The extent to which a study becomes the basis for another's work.

It should be noted that other writers have proposed alternative, though similar, criteria to Reissman, and that at present, there is no universally accepted arbiter for this matter (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My decision to follow Reissman's thoughts is based on the positive experience I had writing my Masters thesis, which also used narrative inquiry. Specifically, I found that through the course of writing my thesis research, it was helpful to remain mindful as to how each story may or may not exemplify the notions of persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use. I have done likewise in my present research. Of particular interest to me, was the idea of correspondence, which as noted above, concerns the degree to which the written storied accounts correspond to the participants' recollected experiences. To help increase the degree of correspondence, the stories were sent back to participants to be read and reflected upon, keeping in mind questions such as: Do you see yourself here? Does this capture your experience of being raised in a nonAboriginal family? Is there anything else to your story that would better help people understand your experience? I then conducted follow-up interviews to receive the participants' feedback in person.

Ethical Care of Participants

This research follows the ethical guidelines for conducting social science research using human participants, as required by the University of Alberta's Ethical Review Committee. These guidelines include:

1) Ensuring that the nature and purpose of the research is clearly explained to participants and that this explanation is fully understood.
2) Obtaining written informed consent from all participants.
3) Provisions for participants to opt out of the research at any time without requiring a reason and without consequence.
4) Provisions for maintaining participant confidentiality and anonymity at all times throughout the course of the research.
5) Explaining any potential risks that might be incurred through participating in the research.

In addition to these provisions, I took steps to ensure that participants were not taken-for-granted in their role as informants and treated as secondary to the aspirations of the research itself. Often in research participants are regarded solely as accessories to the final product, involved only to the extent that they provide the data. Examples of this type of treatment include 1) participants never hearing from the researcher once data is collected, 2) excluding the participants from the processes of transcription and analysis verification, 3) participants not receiving a copy of the final product, and 4) researchers privileging their own data interpretations over that of the participant's.

In this research, I have attempted to "level" the often-hierarchical nature of social science research through ensuring that the participants in this research did not experience the exclusionary practices noted above. This stance is especially important considering the history of Aboriginal-nonAboriginal relations and the innumerable examples of injustice and oppression have been served through colonialism.

Another practice that levels the hierarchy so often present in academic research is the inclusion of the researcher's story. In the opening pages of my dissertation, I situated myself in relation to this project through telling my story of how I became interested in my topic and how I attempted to culturally prepare myself prior to commencing. By telling our stories, narrative inquiry takes on the quality of transparency, which through revealing our biases and intentions, brings greater ethical and methodological integrity to the final product.

CHAPTER 4

Pam's Story

Stories of Childhood

"The day I was taken...It was not a good one."

Darkness, she remembers darkness. Left alone with her infant brother, and barely three years of age, Pam was abandoned by a nineteen year-old mother whose addictions prevented her from caring for her two young children. How many days the two spent in their unlit tenement surroundings is difficult for Pam to say. She guesses it must have been about a week before she and her brother, who was then dying of pneumonia, were discovered and taken into care. Pam's earliest, and only, memory of life before being apprehended, is delivered through a recurring nightmare.

> The only recollection I have is a nightmare I have been plagued with for so long. Sometimes I still get it, but it doesn't affect me the same way. And um, it's just dark and all I hear is a baby crying. And that used to just wake me up screaming. So that's the only real memory I have of it.

Pam still fears the dark, even today, keeping a nightlight to stave off darkness.

When the dim of Pam's memory brightens, she is three years old and travelling along side a social worker who does her best to comfort a frightened and worried companion.

> I still remember sitting beside the social worker in the car, and she was doing the happy talk of course. And then walking into the foster home that was full of kids, and um, hiding behind the social worker because I was scared – I wasn't really sure about what was going on. And I had a definite feeling that I was going to be dumped off again. And her pulling me out in front of her and seeing my foster mother and foster father for the first time. The first thing that came out of my foster mother's mouth was "We don't want her, take her back." And then my foster father saying "No, She's staying with us." And the fight was on from that moment. It had set the tone for the whole relationship. And then them sort of shoving me away with the other kids so they could work out the details. I knew she hated me from the moment she saw me, and

> my father adored me from the moment he saw me. So I was put right in the middle of this tug-of-war.

Pam was fostered into a large prairie farming family, six children in total. At the time of Pam's arrival two biological children – Martin and Jennifer, were already born. Martin is the same age as Pam, Jennifer, a year and a half younger. Donna is four years younger than Pam, followed by Jason who is six years younger. The family also adopted a Caucasian child, Peter, when Pam was about age eleven or twelve. Peter is two years older than Pam.

What transpired in Pam's first meeting with her new family foreshadowed what was to come. Pam recalls mother, Anne, and father, Thomas, as divided in their sentiment towards her. Anne wanted a boy, a playmate for their oldest son, Martin. Gender was less important to Thomas who instantly liked the "cute and feisty" Pam. Being the patriarch of the family, Thomas at once proclaimed his decision: Pam would stay. However, Thomas' position of power and authority in the family, nor his clear endorsement of Pam's standing, could not avert the wrath of violence and condemnation that would be unleashed by Anne.

> My foster mother was very abusive to me. I remember there being a couple of times when it was very close that she throttled me. If someone hadn't intervened she probably would have killed me.
>
> Who would intervene?
>
> My sister, ah Jennifer, and the other foster child, Peter. He was Swedish-Dutch, I think was his heritage. They stopped it before it went too far – it always went too far for me….

Pam recalls the physical abuse as relentless, random in its delivery, and always directed at her; no other child in the home was ever hit. She states that her mother's preferred method of harm was a swift slap in the face.

> Her favourite thing was as I went by she would slap me in the face…I didn't have to do anything wrong – just because I existed.

In Pam's recollection, anything she did could occasion a slap, and thus she cautiously carried out her daily activities, careful not to give reason for additional abuse. Closely she watched her mother, doing what she might to avoid being hurt.

> It never stopped… I always had to make sure I did everything right, that I didn't laugh too loud, play too loud, make sure everything was so clean… And even when I thought I had everything right, I would still be slapped or beaten because I was just alive.

She watched Anne for other reasons as well. Pam desperately sought Anne's love and approval, even more so than her foster father's, which was never in question.

> I wanted the love she lavished on her own children, you know, because she did. To all her children she was absolutely wonderful.

Pam remembers discreetly observing Anne, searching for ways to please her and gain her favour. Not only were attempts unsuccessful, tragically, they incited further abuse.

> I remember one time – it was in spring and I knew she loved crocuses, and I spent a fair amount of time looking for a nice bunch of crocuses. They were all nice, perfect and everything. So I knew that she would really love them…and then coming back with them and getting beaten for sneaking out.

Yearly visits from her social worker should have offered Pam reprieve from the abuse, but did not. At about age six, Pam remembers disclosing the abuse to her worker and requesting that she be moved to a new placement. The social worker then approached Pam's parents, who dismissed the complaint as the sniveling of a child who cries and whines too much. Afterward, Pam recalls that Anne let known her antipathy toward her disclosure by giving her yet another beating. Never again did Pam tell her social worker of the abuse she suffered.

Pam's mistreatment by Anne was not limited to the physical domain. She recalls emotional abuse being equal in intensity and effect to the beatings. The messages Pam received from her mother were consistent: she was ugly, stupid, bad, and did not belong in the family. Statements implying that she was an expendable family member were particularly painful. Pam remembers comments such as "You should be much more grateful because your own family didn't want you, so you should behave better," and "We should just send you back to the holding unit."

For the most part, Pam's recalls that her foster father, Thomas, was oblivious to her daily experiences of physical and verbal abuse. Thomas' life was his work. He enjoyed time with his children, though such time was limited due to long hours spent working the farm and driving a truck. Pam describes him as a good provider who was emotionally constricted and often rigid in his point of view. Pam believes that Thomas could not have been an easy man to live with, and thus concedes that in many ways Anne's life as farm wife and mother to six children was likely very arduous.

> She had to deal with everything – six kids and the farm basically. I mean, I still remember the old washing machine, you know like, where a wash was a two-day thing, you know [laugh]. Um, the gardening, well she had to do all that. And we did have a house helper all the time – well for a while. It just wasn't enough, I mean she, she was very tired. I mean I remember her, you know, having to wake up at five in the morning and not getting to bed until midnight because she's working. And so I was the easy target for all that pent-up anger, or whatever, you know, I was the target.

Pam always felt very loved and accepted by Thomas, and on more than one occasion approached him regarding her mistreatment. Although Thomas would confront Anne, doing so ultimately made things worse.

> In times that it did finally come up that the beating was going on and stuff he would put down his foot and say, "Anne, don't you ever hurt my little girl again" – which only made it worse, calling me his little girl. So then it would just get worse. It would calm down for a while, you know, until he's off doing his own little thing and then of course it all starts up again.

Not only does Pam remember her foster parents as divided in their feelings toward her, she recalls her siblings were as well. Pam's oldest brother, Martin, was virulent in his rejection of her, making it very clear to peers at school, that this "Indian girl" was only a provisional member of the family.

> He was always embarrassed of me…Like at school and stuff, "That's not my sister, that's my foster sister, she's just a foster kid." You know, it was always that: "Just don't talk to me at school."

When children at school teased and bullied Pam, Martin joined right in. Pam explains the effect this had on her, along with what could have made a difference.

> It just set up that feeling of alienation – I don't fit in, because he had reinforced it. Martin was also one of the most popular kids in school, so he really knew how to work the crowd. I mean if he had pulled me into the circle a bit more I probably wouldn't have felt so outside. You know, but to him I was an embarrassment, you know, I was an Indian. The message at that time was that Indians were stupid and ugly and bad, you know, there's just the whole list. And he did not want to associate with me.

Following a public renouncement, Pam would often retreat to a place of solitude where she could be alone and cry. In protest of her mistreatment, Pam in turn rescinded Martin's status as "real brother" choosing instead to refer to him as "foster brother". According to Pam, her other siblings varied in their response when asked by peers "Who is that girl?" To Jennifer she was always a foster sister. Donna might at different times say foster sister or just sister. To younger brother Jason, she was always his "cool" older sister. In general, her siblings' responses eroded Pam's already fragile sense of belonging to the family.

> I mean you can make choices when you are older but [laughter] when you are a kid it's pretty important to belong to the family, which I never did, I never, never belonged. Always tried to…and then as I got older, realized that I never would really fit in anywhere, in that sense, so…got to enjoy it, enjoy living on the outside, but when I was younger, no I never did enjoy that.

Stories of School and Community

"A little town full of White people."

Being the only Aboriginal child in a school void of even a single other person of colour, Pam recalls being faced with a persistent bombardment of racial discrimination. The message, implicit and explicit, was that as an "Indian" she was ugly, dirty, and unintelligent; she did not belong, she did not fit in, and she was not to be befriended.

> I remember one incident in grade school… Whewww, it was ugly. But one of the girls she had um, asked me to her place for lunch and her mom had thought it was okay, but the girl had never told the mother that I was Indian. And uh, my brother had a crush on this little girl, you know how kids can get these little crushes. So he had a crush on her. And I went over there – the mother was nice at lunch time. But then the girl came back the next day and announced to everyone – like the whole classroom – and said, "My mother said that you are never allowed to come to my house again and I'm not allowed to play with you because you're nothing but a dirty Indian. My brother, instead of being supportive goes, 'See how you just ruin everything."

Racism pushed Pam to the fringe of her peer community. At home she recalls feeling like an outcast who would never fit in. At school, her feeling was no different. Pam's sister, Jennifer, believed that her troubles were self-inflicted, and that if she simply tried harder to fit in, she would.

> Her attitude was I kept on bringing on all the problems myself. "Well, if you'd just try to fit in more" – that was her common thing, "Well you just have to try and fit in more." And I'd be sitting there going, "I can't Jennifer, I can't change my colour, I can't change my race, they are never going to accept me because of that."

Two schoolmates eventually did accept and befriend her. In keeping with Pam's own experiences of alienation, these two girls were also ostracized from the dominant peer group.

> The only kids that accepted me were Lisa, who was absolutely insane because she had been beaten by her mother worse than I was. Um, so she was literally crazy. And then you had Darcy, who was an extremely pretty girl, but she came from absolute poverty, you know, just total poverty. So the rest of the kids wouldn't accept those two because, you know, they were outsiders, too. And then me, you know. So we became friends because there was just nobody else [laughter], and we were just troublemakers. And Darcy was so shy and introverted and…and then Lisa was just so out-there crazy, and there's me and I'm just sitting there, I just have a different colour [laughter].

It is Pam's belief that Darcy and Lisa preferred the farm life of her family home to their own dismal domestic situations. There was plenty of diversion on the farm for all three, riding horses and enjoying the freedom afforded by space. Days spent on the farm with her two friends could be carefree and fun, allowing Pam a rare sense of security and safety. But overall, she recalls her childhood as one of sadness and despair due, in part, to intense feelings of loneliness and alienation. Connection with the Aboriginal community or Aboriginal family members was virtually nonexistent, an exception being her maternal grandfather, who literally wandered into Pam's life for a short while, beginning about age twelve.

> It was one of those freaky things where my mother was driving home. We were driving home from the city, on a back road, and um, there was this man walking along, an Indian man, and the fact that my mother would have actually stopped for him freaks me out [laughter]. And when she talks it freaks her out too, because she goes "You know, I don't know what hit me, I just had to stop." And so she stopped for him. And when he got into the car, he turned around and looked at me and he called me by my name. And so my mother goes "Well how did you know her?" and he goes, "Oh, that's my granddaughter" [laughter].

Pam recalls that for the next three to four years her grandfather made an annual visit to the farm to teach her of family and the old ways. She was comforted by his words telling that if she were among her own people, she would have been revered as one of the gifted people. Her gift was that of a dreamer:

> To be a dreamer is to… um, it's like tapping into another world, and seeing this world. And um, dreamers used to be, used to find the buffalo if you were on a hunt, and so you had a dreamer – they were there to do that. Or if there was a problem then they were the ones that would dream and find the solution. So, um, that's basically what it was. And with myself I'd always - dreams were always my way of dealing with whatever I was going through. I guess it was because it was natural to me, so it just happened.

As a child, Pam's grandfather, along with her gift as a dreamer, were the only links she had to her cultural and spiritual heritage. Pam recalls that one dream in particular afforded her feelings of solace and escape.

> It was even before my grandfather showed up, I would have dreams of this deer that would come to me, this big beautiful stag, it had beautiful antlers and big brown eyes. And he would come to me at night and I would get on his back and he would take me all over. Every night he would do this, and he would talk. And that's where I found a lot of my peace or freedom.

Pam's states that her mother allowed her grandfather's visits, but became enraged when she spoke of her dreams. Though her dream brought her great comfort, it was vilified by Anne who considered it ungodly, and acted toward Pam accordingly.

> I remember one time talking to my foster mother about this deer and, you know, in my conversation how real he was, you know like, "Oh he told me…" And the look on my mother's face of pure horror. And then she'd started beating on me because she said, "Well that's the devil." And I'm like, "Not some one who is as nice as that is the devil, he loves me, he cares for me. And being told never to talk of that again. But every night he would take me away on him.

As an adult, a great uncle once asked to meet Pam to determine whether she was a direct descendant of those with the dreamer gift. His investigation found that she was, though unfortunately the debris of old beliefs prevented Pam from accepting an offer to stay with him and learn more about the traditional ways. The short time with her great uncle did, however, dispel the belief that her dreaming was evil and debased.

> His purpose for meeting me was to find out if I really was a dreamer. And when he found out that I really was, then he decided that he wanted me to stay with him – I would live with him and he would teach me the old ways. At that time, because I was still very… even though I had rejected the Catholic religion I was still having to separate myself from it, in the sense that all of the "devil" and all of that other stuff [laughter] was still very stuck in my head. And um, how the Indians practiced more like witchcraft. So, I was more afraid than anything. Especially learning that I was supposed to be something that I thought – that I was taught was wrong, so I ended up not going with him. And it is a regret of mine.

Although Pam regrets not taking up her great uncle's invitation to come live with him, she was greatly relieved to learn that she was neither crazy nor diabolic because she dreamed spiritual dreams.

> It was like a big huge weight came off of me. I thought it was just – well because I had been told I was crazy it was like "Oh, okay, there are other people like me out there." I wasn't so afraid of dreams after that, and I guess I trusted them quite a bit more.

Stories of Adolescence

"There was no way I was ever going to fit in. "

As an adolescent, Pam's recalls her world as engulfed by pain and suffering It seemed someone was always trying to hurt her, whether physically or emotionally. She was beaten at home; she was beaten at school. Racist attitudes, fueled by negative stereotypes toward Aboriginal people, were ubiquitous, harsh, and led to extreme

experiences of rejection and exclusion. To be Aboriginal was to be drunk, lazy, stupid, ugly, and dirty.

> You know, Indians were ugly that was another thing that I always, always heard … comments from the other girls "Oh I would never go out with an Indian, that's just disgusting."
>
> That attitude that Indians were just scum. And no matter what, there was no way that I was ever going to fit in. Um, other than, you know, a couple of my friends, there was no way that I was every going to fit in. Darcy she, she remained my friend, but um, of course she had problems with it, too, because her friend is always being called down and beaten up. And then I became really tough in that sense, because I was one of the smaller kids, you know at that time. And being constantly beat up, I was trying, I was fighting anorexia really bad at that point. Um…being in the hallway, there was this one boy and he was just constantly harassing me and physically hurting me. And a lot of the, you know, the boys wouldn't think anything of hitting each other or an Indian, because we didn't count. And that's what they told me "You're not a girl like the rest of them."

To her peers, Pam was less than human, and thus deserving of physical harm, degradation, and exile. Survival required that she become "really tough" to ward off threats from both her tormentors and her inner emotional struggles.

With her dark skin, dark eyes, and long dark hair, the family photo became one more reminder that she did not belong. Adding to her sense of displacement were the comments she recalls overhearing regarding the family photo.

> I've always been reminded that I don't belong – always! We have one family picture and I absolutely despise that picture – absolutely despise it. Because you have this White family and I'm naturally quite dark – because of my illness I've lightened up quite a bit compared to my real colour which is really quite, quite a dark colour. And in that picture I'm still really dark. And I just stand out. It's just right there…you know, that person does not belong in that picture. And that's the first thing people say, you know, and I've heard other relatives and people that have seen that picture, "Well who's that girl?" You know, right away. Or, "It would be really nice if she wasn't in there." They don't think I'm there, or they don't care maybe. You know, it's still that same hurtful type of comment.

As a teenager, Pam remembers harbouring immense feeling of shame and discontent towards being Aboriginal. She did not want to be Indian; she wanted to be White skinned, blond, and blue eyed, just like her younger sister Donna. She wanted to blend in so that she could fit in. Pam says that her determination to be White led her to bleach her skin and colour her hair, but to no avail. Everything in her experience told her that being Aboriginal was the worst fate one could possibly endure. On one occasion, this message of denigration was delivered to Pam by her parents in a disturbing and absurd fashion.

> I was 16 and just starting to get an inkling about boys. And I went to this one school dance and there was this work crew, a rail line work crew. And this one Metis guy – I mean he was just smitten. And I went out with him, he asked me out, I remember that. He came to the house – I forget how it worked out that I ended up, he ended up driving me home that night. So um, somehow a group of us were driving around and they ended up taking my friend and I, because my friend was staying at my place. And so he had asked me out the next day. And he came and took me out, went to a movie or something, and you know, he brought me back and stuff. And I got the biggest lecture…on Indians. I mean that one hurts, too. He wasn't good enough for me because he was an Indian, and I'm looking at them thinking, "Oh my God, what the hell am I? If he's not good enough for me, who's good enough? Who am I good enough for?"

Pam was led to believe that Aboriginal people were the "lowest of the low", yet she could not be White, nor did it seem that she would be accepted as someone who belonged to the White community. When she tried to connect to the Aboriginal community through dating a Metis man, she received the message that this person was an inferior class of human, and that by implication, so was she. Not surprisingly, Pam did not want to be Aboriginal, yet, as an Aboriginal peer so brashly informed her, she would be ill-received if she tried to be White.

> There was a football game, and an Indian school was one of the teams. And I was just sitting there with my friends – my gay friend on one side and my

> Marilyn Monroe friend on the other [laughter]. And um, the cheerleaders and like the supporters and the football players, they were all Indian on one side of the field. And then there was all these White people and me [laughter]. And one of the football players came up to me – an Indian one – and in front of everyone, said, "What are you doing with all this White trash? They'll never accept you no matter what."

The teenage Aboriginal football player confirmed what through life experience Pam already knew: it would be very difficult for her to gain acceptance within White society. Sadly, the Aboriginal community afforded little refuge from the often rejecting and hostile White community. To other Aboriginals she was an apple: White on the inside, red on the outside. Pam explains the effects of not having anyone with whom she could base her identity, and how this led to her desire to reconnect with her biological family.

> I had no identity. I had nothing…I didn't really have a family. I didn't have anybody in the community to identify with…there was nobody else like me. I would see other Indians, but at that time there was such a division between what was referred to as the "apples" – red on the outside, White on the in – and um, the regular Indians, or whatever you want to call them. So I couldn't identify there, and I thought if I knew where I came from, maybe I could understand who I was, or put myself in a place where I could um, maybe even find somebody like one of my relatives that was more like myself, brought up White but was still an Indian. You know? I think that was my main goal to try and find someone more like myself in the family, somebody to say that um, okay that's what I'm like, that's the way I want to be and, you know, focussing on that. Instead of that feeling of …absolute feeling of not belonging.

Through her adolescent years, Pam experienced overwhelming feelings of disconnection from community, family, and self. In her world, there was no one with whom she could base her identity, and hence, no one with whom she could turn to for empathic understanding. Pam believed that reconnecting with her birth family would be the antidote to her terrible feeling of loneliness and isolation, so at age fifteen she

initiated a search for "someone like me", though ironically, her foster family discouraged her.

> When I was fifteen I had gone through this thing where I wanted to know about my past, and it was just a drive. And so nobody was helping me. My foster family were saying "What do you want to do with them, we love you." You know, just guilted me. And then I was calling around to people, anyone with the last name that I had known of, so I was just calling. And I finally hit one, and she knew who I was immediately. And she had said "Do you realize that you are not allowed to have any contact with the family?" And I said, "No, nobody told me that." And then welfare got involved and told me that I was not allowed to have any information until I was sixteen. So um, I kept on searching anyways. But I kept on running up to walls. On my sixteenth birthday my mother called, and that's how contact started. And she committed suicide about three months later. And I met most of her family at her funeral, but that was quite overwhelming.

It was at her birth mother's funeral that Pam first reconnected with her biological brother. At the time, she had no memory of even having a brother. Mark had also been fostered into a White family and also suffered terrible abuse. However, for Pam, the reunion of these two emotionally battered adolescents was not the happily-ever-after spectacle proffered on the nightly news.

> It just seemed like something exploded in both of us, it was just like insanity. And so after that it was like every time I met him it was just like insanity. Both of us acting out, acting out this stuff that we didn't even know we were acting out.

The two together equaled a destructive combination. When they met, Pam was already abusing amphetamines and alcohol, which she then introduced to Mark. Today she regrets her negative influence on Mark, who later struggled with his own severe addiction issues. The intensity of their fledgling relationship resulted in Pam's decisions to pull back in order to slow her own emotional health descent.

> Mark was still pretty innocent about all that stuff, and it just sort of seemed that he fell right into it. And I've always felt bad about that, the negative influence I had there. And then other times, because he really got into drugs

> and alcohol… he came close to death. And just messing each other's life's up when we were around each other. He tried to commit suicide. I always remember that… umm… Me every time, trying to disassociate myself from him, really trying – "I don't want to deal with you, I don't want to have anything to do with you anymore," and not being able to, you know, just being stuck in this whirlwind with him all the time.

For Pam, spending time with her brother incited tremendous emotional upheaval. Realizing that this was unhealthy for her, she tried to emotionally and physically distance herself from Mark. This has not been easy. Pam maintains that the caretaker role she held as a young child, coupled with Mark's "desperate" need for her love, keeps her returning back to their tumultuous relationship – despite its destructive nature.

Rather than being her deliverance, reconnection with her biological family brought increased hopelessness and despair. Pam describes this period in her life, and how even her friends, Darcy and Lisa, ultimately rejected her.

> [Said crying] I spent a lot of time crying. A lot of time being really lonely. [crying 25 sec] Everybody else…it seemed had somebody to be with. And it was hard on my friends, it was hard on Darcy. It was hard on this other girl because, you know, they get the fall-out, too. So, a lot of times even they just ignored me, they didn't want to be near me. So, the anorexia got worse, the acting out got worse…and…I drove cars, maybe one time I would have a really good accident [not crying anymore]. And then I started speed, which was part of the anorexia… started drinking… started hanging out with guys who were a lot older. Why they hung out with me – it was weird because I didn't really like men…
>
> [voice breaking] I really didn't want to live, just…[quietly crying]. I hate going back there. [quietly crying]. When you…when all you see ahead of you is darkness, there's no way out. It didn't matter, I mean I was at school and I was being abused. I went home and I was being abused. There were no safe places, except with Mr. Harrison and then he had to be so careful because you know, of course, he had to worry about people saying that he's molesting me, and so he was very careful. By the time I was sixteen I had an ulcer, my stomach was all the way through. I remember looking into my brother and sister's eyes and just seeing the embarrassment at having an Indian for a sister. You know my sister would, when we were at home, she would talk to me and

> play with me, or you know, be the sibling. But at school, she totally ignored me. Same with my brother. Well, I didn't even talk to him at home either.

In her world of darkness and despair, her grade eight teacher, Mr. Harrison offered a slight glimmer of light. From the time she learned to read, at age four, Pam found comfort in the printed word. By grade eight or nine she says she was reading at a university level and was literate in fields of study such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history. Self-education became part of a project that took her well into her adult years: better thyself, and "outclass the Whites" while doing it. Pam was highly intelligent. This, she knew, yet it went unrecognized as there was no expectation that she should achieve any semblance of academic standing and received little pressure from her teachers to do so. Pam coasted through elementary school, content to be "the Indian back in the corner." In grade eight this changed as Mr. Harrison took notice of Pam's intellectual ability and began focussing more attention upon her. She cherished his attention and encouragement, along with the feelings of validation it engendered. However, Pam's academic prowess was soon turned against her, and thus proved perilous. Mandatory intelligence testing placed Pam at the top of her class, but rather than invite accolade, this brought scorn from teachers and students alike. In her view, she had disrupted the racially sanctioned social order, and this was let known to her.

> Everyone, the kids, the teachers, um, Mr. Harrison was the only one that stood by me. Because then I had the teachers in class, in front of all the other students, of course, "Well, you've got the highest IQ here you should be doing a hell of a lot better than that." Well, then of course the kids "What do you mean, she's just an Indian." And of course, I was just tormented continuously after that. And that's why I quit in grade 10.

Feeling cast out and rejected by friends, family, and community, Pam served notice of protest through concession: if she were to be driven to the edges, she would operate from the edges.

> I started designing some of my own clothes – just really outrageous stuff. Just, you know, because…it didn't matter. It didn't matter what I did, what I said, nothing, mattered, I mean…I was labeled. I was that Indian, and she's just like all the rest of them. You know, it didn't matter.

Similarly, as long as the beatings handed Pam were not dependent on her behaviour, she chose to behave in ways that would at least provide some justification for her mistreatment.

> With mom it was, after awhile it was, so what. So what, I'm going to get beaten anyways, so I will sneak out with my friends tonight and we will steal cars and carry on and do stuff – it doesn't matter because I am just going to go back to hell anyways. So ya I did get like that. I always made sure I did my chores and stuff, though. I always made sure I did the expectations of the family, I always made sure those were done. But then I also had this other life that was just out of control.
>
> It really did not matter what I did anyways, so I might as well enjoy myself while I'm at it. My thing was drugs – speed, I loved speed. Umm, wasn't interested in guys too much. All my friends were always surprised about that because boys were boys [laughter] – they were just the ones who came along with you to help hot-wire the cars [laughter]. But other than that, you know, just go out and be with my friends – do drugs, drink.

At age seventeen Pam decided she would no longer tolerate her mother's verbal and physical abuse. Thomas' desperate appeals for her to stay – even the threat to sell her beloved horse – did not dent her resolve. Anne graciously drove her to the highway, where Pam raised her thumb and awaited her departure.

At age nineteen Pam hitchhiked to Alberta, where she spent the summer travelling about, working odd jobs and living on a commune outside of Calgary. Looking back, she says she had no plan, no one specific to meet in Alberta, just a

desire to escape. It was here that she met her first serious partner, Denis. At the end of the summer, Denis went back to Montreal where he attended university, whereas Pam moved to Regina.

Once in Regina, Pam secured financial support from social services, such that she could live on her own while attending a high school that took older students. She recalls being determined to finish her grade twelve.

Unlike past educational experiences, her new school had a significant Aboriginal population. Racial division, however, kept socializing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to a minimum. The Aboriginal students quickly picked up that Pam "acted White" and thus excluded her from their social grouping. Once more, she was faced with making White friends, and once more, her attempts floundered under the strain of racist sentiment.

> Again I was stuck in that world. Like I did have a couple of White friends that were going to the school…but in the school it was already segregated, too between a lot of the students. The one girl she really did not, she was just totally colour blind, she didn't care what colour you were, which was really nice. But, her family cared. Because here I am, I have lived on my own when I was going to high school. You know, they had heard my reputation. Um, so they ended up telling her she wasn't to hang around with me. So she ended up not because she didn't want to go against her parents – which I appreciate, because her parents were wonderful to her. So I was alone again. And I had the Indian kids started calling me apple…because I couldn't fit in with them.

As with past experiences, Pam's experience at her new school reinforced that her acceptance amongst peers – Aboriginal or White – would be extremely difficult. And so as familiar feelings of loneliness and dejection took hold, she began associating with the "wrong" crowd who introduced her to marijuana, which she used to dull the emotional pain of not belonging. Pam's grades subsequently plummeted leading her to quit school and move again. Despite being alone, and despite

February's cold hard days, Pam once more took to the highway and hitched her way across the country, this time to Montreal, where she reunited with Denis.

Stories of young adulthood

"A big turn around."

Once in Montreal, Pam found work at a local Native office. Pam's Aboriginal colleagues were very welcoming of her, and she enjoyed the happy and carefree atmosphere of her work place. This was her first sustained contact with other Aboriginal people, however, she says that the controlling ways of her abusive partner, Denis, prevented a more fulfilling relationship with the Aboriginal community. Fumbling for direction and identity in her life, Pam moved with Denis to Vancouver, where for the first time things began to look more promising. Pam credits the unconditional love and acceptance of two men as being instrumental in helping her bring about positive change in her life.

> When I got to Vancouver, I was eighteen. That's when I started to have a big turn around, and I met Dave, he became my mentor. He was an older Haida man. And I worked with him as a drug and alcohol counsellor. But he was also my mentor in the sense that…he really loved me. It was just absolutely total unconditional love. There was no…no real expectations no nothing, he just, he just absolutely loved me. And he's the one that gave me the strength to finally go on to really start waking up [laughter]. That's what I call it, you know, because there was just so many years there where it was just, just going from one place to another, being in an extremely abusive relationship. Um, you know, of course there's the drug experimentation. Ya, he was a big force in my life. And then another one was um, Clifford. He was, he was in a band – and a White guy, tall, blonde, blue-eyed, beautiful man, um, also bisexual. And he actually ended up being a really positive influence. And he also gave me unconditional love, just he really really loved me. And he was also the hardest person on me because my partner at the time he was just, he was extremely abusive. And Clifford finally got to the point where he just told me, he said to me "I love you so much and I can't be around you when this is happening." And he left my life. And you know, it was one of the best things that he did for me [laughter]. Because it really woke me up [laughter].

For the first time in Pam's life, it did not matter that she was Aboriginal, or that she was raised in a White versus Aboriginal home. She was accepted for who she was, and through this, was able to "wake up" to the possibility of a more meaningful, less troubled, life.

After leaving Denis, Pam met Ted. Ted was intelligent and funny – two traits that Pam very much appreciated. Though not overly interested in marriage, particularly to someone who has White, at age twenty-four, amidst an ultimatum from her would be husband, Pam married Ted. Thomas and Anne were very pleased at her decision to marry a White man, though not everyone shared their excitement.

> Even though my husband comes from a very good family, highly religious – very nice people. You know they didn't go way overboard – they had some liberal ideas even in their very religious outlook. Um, so the family themselves didn't have an attitude about Indians. But you know, as you went out, the rest of the family, the extended family, then you'd start seeing more of the Indian prejudices coming out, and then of course the community. And I remember somebody saying, and not thinking I heard it, but saying, "Well, Ted could have done so much better than being with an Indian."

Pam asserts that such forms of racism eventually contributed to the termination of her marriage with Ted. It underscored for her what has been a constant burden in her life: the message that as an Aboriginal person she is inferior and thus will be discriminated against.

At age twenty-four Pam was diagnosed with cancer. She turned to alternative healing methods to treat her illness, and once more to the heavy use of alcohol. This changed, however, with news of pregnancy, and at age twenty-six Pam and Ted gave birth to a baby boy they named Shawn. With the arrival of the new baby, Pam's family insisted that all should spend Christmas together. Once back at her parents' house, Pam recalls that Anne started in with her all-too-familiar verbal degradation.

She had had enough. With the support of an aunt, together they broke the silence that had for so many years enshrouded the abuse.

> That Christmas it was just a constant picking, nagging, just carrying on, and I had snapped finally. And I had said, you know, "Why is it that you feel you have to always hurt me. What have I done so bad to you that you think that I have to be the one picked on?" And then it just exploded. Of course this turned into the Christmas from hell [laughter] because the whole family then got into the fight, and it was just one of those horrible scenes where everybody is screaming and shouting and I'm in the centre as being the troublemaker. And it was all my fault, and of course then the family did the division, you know, where everyone sort of went with mom, or did what dad did, sort of just "I'm outa here," [laughter] like just sort of sat back, "I'm not going to say a word." [laughter] And it was my aunt that finally stopped it because she's the one that said the truth for a change. It was the first time it had been brought out. And um, like she told my mom, she said, "You've been beating her up from day one." And um, "You've never accepted her as your daughter, and it's time to start. And my mother was like, "I never beat her." And my aunt just said, "It's time to just stop it, stop lying. You beat her and you've hit her all the time, and you say mean things to her, what do you expect? Why do you not expect this person to act out?" And she said, "If she was trying to get back at the family, she could really say a lot of mean things." At that point I started telling the whole family – because my aunt was there, she had finally, she turned to me and said, she had just said, "You start saying what you really want to say to these people." And at that point I told them a lot of the stuff. So a lot of the stuff came out at that weekend. So, Merry Christmas! [laughter]

Never again was Pam hit by Anne, though it took a few years before she would take responsibility for all that she had done and make restitution.

> Ya, it took another few years for my mother and I to resolve it. It was actually Donna, and it was about eight years later. I mean of course it was always tense with my mother and I after that and, you know, there were some squabbles, but she never hit me again, after that. And Donna had finally, she brought my mom to Calgary and she said, "Okay this is going to end one way or the other. Either we're just going to separate the family and just, okay this is over with, or we're just going to get it together." And um, she brought my mom to Calgary for the weekend, and it was one of those – another one of those knock-out, drag-out, yelling and screaming, and carrying on with each other, and resolving a lot of the stuff. And my mother asked me what I wanted from her, and I just said "An apology – just apologize, just acknowledge what you did." And I said, "I'll let it all go." Which happened, you know. I mean of

> course it's tense at times, like things come up, but it's not the way it was before.

Pam believes that Anne carried a huge burden of guilt for what she had done, and thus was "released" of this though the act of forgiveness. She is proud of her mother for having the courage to apologize, noting that many abusive parents never do. Since this time their relationship, though at times still tense, has improved to a point where Pam now likens her relationship with Anne to that of a friendship.

> She's the only mother I have ever had really [laughter]. But it's also, in a sense she really never was a mother. So, um, for me it's more comfortable to be a friend. I still call her mom and all that stuff, you know, and honour her on Mother's Day and stuff like that, but it's – no, I'm more comfortable with a friend.

Stories of Adulthood

"On the fringe of the family."

Although her relationship with Anne improved, adulthood in itself did not remedy a life-long feeling of not belonging to the family. As an adult, family members still say things, perhaps without malevolent intent, that painfully remind Pam she is not true kin, as are the others.

> The other sister Jennifer, she was talking about some family stuff, about some of the other brothers and herself and how dad was disappointed at them. And I had mentioned he's not very proud of me either. And she said, "Well what difference does that make? You're not one of the real kids. We're talking about the real kids." It was very very hurtful – extremely hurtful actually.

Although Pam has never questioned her father's love for her, he makes a similar comment when he casually refers to her as "his pet." Though stated as a term of endearment, and without malicious in intent, the statement reinforces for Pam the long-dreaded feeling that she is an expendable – nonessential – member of the family.

> They talk about things, and you realize just how insignificant you are. You get that feeling that you're just a throw away. I felt like a puppy…you know, like you go to a litter, and it has always tortured me every time I seen people looking at puppies or kittens and deciding which one they want. It's always always hurt, because it's on the whim of somebody that you are chosen…it's not like with my son it was…it wasn't a choice, it was just life. But to be thrown away as a child and realizing it and then having somebody choose you like you're, you're some little expendable puppy, and that's, that's what most people feel like. You know, like they feel like the rest of their lives: Are they going to change their mind and drop me off at the holding centre again?

Introductions are another occasion where Pam's membership in the family is rendered suspect. Pam believes that her mother's equivocal response represents a fear that without disclaimer, it could be thought Pam was the child of Anne and an Aboriginal partner.

> That's how she would introduce me, "This is my foster daughter Pam." It was immediate, it was ah, "I have no connection to the Indians, so don't even go there." Now she will…she probably explains it when I am not there, but she won't say it in front of me anymore.

Thomas' response is much different. Without hesitation, he clearly indicates that Pam is his daughter, and that she is a part of his family like any other of his children.

> My father, he never identified me as the foster daughter, "This is my daughter." And then if they asked a question he would immediately say "That is none of your business."

The mixed messages that Pam receives regarding her standing in the family are also reflected in her extended family's attitude toward her. Consistent with the marital division between Anne and Thomas, of Anne's extended family only one aunt and one cousin recognize her as part of the family. On her father's Dutch side, the family is very accepting of her, and always has been. It saddens Pam that her son, Shawn, is also given the message that he is not a true member of the family. For

example, Pam says that Shawn's cousins will stress to him that he isn't really a cousin. Pam believes that when she eventually dies, so will Shawn's connection to her family.

> It makes me sad in a way because I don't have a real family to give to my son. He has one on his father's side and no matter what he's always going to be connected to that family. But on my side, basically the connection is done when Shawn wants it done, which is why I have the feeling that once I'm not around, it'll be over.

For Pam, her foster family is the only family she has. Calamity, death, and disconnection have severed ties to her birth family. Mark, her brother, is in prison for murder. Visits with him are always intensely distressing, as time has not been able to diminish the emotional turmoil wedged between them. Pam's mother, along with other aunts and uncles have completed suicide. Her grandmother is now senile, and her biological father is suffering from alcohol addiction.

The absence of family angers Pam, and is the reason she chose to participate in this research. She feels strongly that an injustice has been served to herself, her brother, and countless other Aboriginal children who were removed from their birth families without parental recourse to a second chance. She does not dispute that her mother's neglect placed them in grave danger and that some type of intervention was necessary. She does, however, question why twelve years of sobriety did not spur child welfare to give Pam's mother an opportunity to redeem herself.

> She should have been given another chance. She had stopped drinking, she was really trying to make a life of for herself. She had remarried, you know, um, she spent the rest of her life mourning the fact that, you know, she lost her kids. And ah, ya, they should have given her another chance. But ya, you know, like you always want, you want your own family.
>
> Mark and I we should have had that chance of being with our mother for a while. I mean chances are she would have screwed up and done something

> wrong again, but it wouldn't have been any worse than what we were in. But we would have known, we would have known, yes we had a screwed up mother but she tried to love us, she tried to do her part. Instead of that feeling of…no connectedness to the world. Which both my brother and I have. And I only understand that now because I have a son, just how disconnected I am from the world when I look at my son. You know, and, and those feelings I have toward my son, of that's my only anchor and connectedness to this world, is him. But you need that, you need that when you are young, because otherwise you go through what I went through.

Stories of relational disconnection pervade Pam's experience of being raised in a nonAboriginal family. And although this disconnection, in all of its manifestations, has engendered tremendous feelings of loneliness, alienation, and despair, it has not prevented Pam from achieving a long-held educational dream. In her mid-twenties Pam enrolled in academic upgrading, commencing a journey that culminated twenty years later with a diploma in engineering. Pam was the first Aboriginal woman in North America to earn such a distinction, however, success did not come easily. Poor health meant needing extra time to complete her program. Adding to this were White male cohorts who denounced the presence of a woman – an "Indian" woman at that, encroaching on their territory.

> And when I went into college and to be with all males – all White males to begin with – and going against the grain altogether: "Well if you want to think like a man, well then we're going to treat you like a man." And they did, in the sense that they got physical with me a couple times. And then with the mental attitude, well you're just an Indian anyway, so, you know. Ya, so they were really rough on me physically.

Pam's accomplishment in college earned considerable attention from her peers, teachers, and the media. Yet she says her parents were mystified by the veneration paid to their daughter. When Pam was a child they believed she held little promise to be successful in life and were quick to stifle any avowed hopes and desires. For example, she recalls a time in her childhood when she wanted to be an air

stewardess, but was told by her parents that she did not look right and that there was no way an airline would ever hire an Indian. After a while Pam kept private her dreams of a better future. When her parents attended her college graduation, they were astonished by the magnitude of her reception.

> It really freaked them out because when they announced my name and I came out, the whole auditorium just started cheering. It was really freaky. Because a lot of people knew me, they knew the struggle I had to get through college. A lot of instructors were there just because they knew I was graduating, that normally wouldn't have shown up for the ceremony. And it was the loudest cheer for anyone who had gone up, even the ones who had won honours and all this stuff. And then I come out and it was just like this big roar. And um, I remember my dad mentioning it after, because he was really surprised. They never see that part of me, and they still don't. Because they have this image of me that they are just not going to let go. I was just the troublemaker.

"Going against the grain." These are the words Pam used to describe her decision to enroll in engineering – a course of study dominated by White, middle-class men. These words also describe Pam's refusal to accept or succumb to the social constraints levied against her because of her racial heritage, or as she says, "believe what the herd is saying." Fully aware of society's predominantly negative portrayal of Aboriginal people, Pam intentionally set out to refute stereotypical images though elevating her "class" to that of a White, middle-to-upper-class, North American.

> I tend to act, higher class. My foster family is very "Saskatchewan farmer". Most people when they meet me think I come from a very cultured, very educated family. And it's something I developed over the years, you know, the chameleon. Just um, outclass the Whites, and I purposely did that, you know I have to admit that was something I purposely did. "You think you're so much better than me, well I'll show you what an Indian can be like." And I purposely went out and did that.

Pam's forays into White society are not always readily accepted. At times it is frustrating for her to encounter situations where individuals cling to racial stereotypes of Aboriginal people, despite evidence to the contrary.

> It's very hard, specially when they find out my education, it's like, you know they'll ask, "Well what did you take?" No, I usually get "Do you have your high school?" "Well ya!" [laughter] "Do you have any college?" And it's like, "Ya, it took me awhile, but I got my diploma." And ah, "What is it?" And it's like as soon as I say it they're just floored.... Then it's, "Well Indians aren't interested in that." And I'm sitting there going, "I'm not just an Indian, I'm a human being and I've got a brain just like everybody else, and interests." And so they get mad at me for that, too, because they don't want to accept it. People don't want their stereotypes broken away, their identity of other people.

Pam states that in some instances the reaction she elicits when negating how Aboriginal people are "supposed" to be is almost amusing.

> I was going out with a Metis guy, he was quite dark and stuff, but he also loved the classics, and opera, we were both just opera buffs. And I remember us going into the Jubilee, and how people would actually, you know see us go by, and that "Huhh!" [laughter] Or that whisper around us, "I didn't know that Indians like opera" [laughter]. So that's society's attitude about Indians. They just peg us that either we're the romantic "Dances with Wolves" or we're the skid row bums, there's no in between. And then when somebody like me comes along and just crashes down all those barriers.

Strolling amongst the opera crowd, Pam hears the whispers of dissonance as she quietly dismantles racial stereotypes which hold that as Aboriginals she and her partner have crossed a social boundary. But it is not only the stratified social boundaries that Pam finds herself at odds with; there are also instances where physical boundaries are crossed that consequently remind her of the ubiquity of racial discrimination against Aboriginal people. Pam recalls one such experience that occurred while she and her current partner Vincent visited her parents in the private campground where they keep their fifth-wheel trailer.

> That was another time that being Indian in an all White community sort of reared it's ugly head again. In the campground there's no Indians. There's no coloured people at all. And um, Vincent and I went out there to stay with them a week. He had the tent all set up behind the fifth wheel. But, I had been in the laundry room, I had been doing some of my laundry, and some people were walking by and it was just the looks they were giving me I just knew. I knew

> that these people were having problems with an Indian being in the camp. So okay I'm doing my laundry and all of a sudden security shows up. And I'm sort of sitting on the one machine reading a book and not really thinking about it, and he come up and they start asking questions: "So who are you? What are you doing here? Where are you staying?" And it was just like, I just calmly answered everything, and you know, just didn't really…ya, I felt really bad. Because it wasn't because I was just a person there doing laundry, it was because I was an Indian doing laundry in this White camp. And so, you know, they asked me which camp I was with, and I said "Oh, Thomas Vanholden." And they said, "Well why are you there?" "Because I'm his daughter." And they assumed I was lying because they ran over to see dad right away. I was really hurt, but there was no way I was going to cry in front of these security people. But once I got back to camp my dad was like "Oh well, they were just wondering who you were." And I said "Dad have you ever been asked? Has anyone else in this family ever been asked?" And he said "No." I was really upset and I went into the tent and I was crying. And they came up and ah, dad had asked them about that and they were "Oh we were just asking." And it was "Oh Pam you are being too sensitive again."

As she traverses the routines of daily life, Pam states that she is repeatedly confronted by racism. And although it can rear its offensiveness in many different contexts, its message to Pam remains the same: As an Aboriginal woman she does not belong to, and will not be accepted by, White society. In this particular incident, Pam asserts that both family members and security guards denied their actions were at all related to race, instead rendering her complaints as evidence that she was being overly sensitive.

Through it all, Pam has persevered. She has refused to submit to societal hindrances, and in doing so, has avoided the perils that greet many Aboriginal people:

> I mean it is easy to fall into the gutter. I mean that's the easiest thing to do in the world [laughter]. The hard part is taking the shit and the abuse and still keep going forward. And it is, it's the White attitude, you know, the White attitude towards Indians.

The White attitude towards Aboriginal people has been instrumental in shaping Pam's identity. It has been a struggle to overcome the barrage of negative

messages received as a child regarding her Aboriginal identity. She says that Dave, her Haida mentor, certainly played an important role in helping her become proud of her Aboriginal heritage and to embrace this aspect of her identity. However, her time in college influenced her identity in a different sense, in that her academic accomplishment led to a realization that no single identity was summative of her personhood.

> It was a hard haul. But it was also, it was one of those things that also helped me identify me more, in the sense that I no longer really identify myself as um, a woman – its weird. You know, I like being a woman and stuff, but it's not my main identity. I no longer identify myself as being an Indian, even though I am. And it is a part that I like and stuff, but it's also not who I am.

Not one self, but many selves, all coalescing to become a remarkable individual – Pam. It has taken a lifetime for Pam to achieve a sense of peace with who she is as a person. She punctuated our six hours of conversation with ideas regarding what would have made a difference to her life while growing up.

> It all comes from a sense of not knowing who you really are.... I think that knowing who you are is really important. And that's what I come out of this with...if somebody was there for me all through my life with a steady sense of giving me my self, I think I could have made it a lot better. I wouldn't have gone through all the struggle later on – and still go through.

For Pam there was a strong need for someone to impart a sense of self that reflects both her outward Aboriginal appearance and her inward "White" psyche. To provide an identity with which she could say this is me and this is okay – I'm okay. Pam still, today, struggles with what for most is a routine, trivial event: looking into the mirror. For Pam, the pervasive experience of not belonging, of not belonging to family community, culture, and society, has led to her most difficult experience of all – the experience of disembodiment, that is, not belonging to her own body.

I don't look in the mirror very often. That's another thing… because I have been socialized White I tend to think of myself as White. And I look into the mirror and I see this Indian person, and it's like a shock because I don't even fit into my own image… that one hurt. Didn't see that one coming [crying] …in my head I'm White, but then I look in the mirror and I'm not.

Calvin's Story

Stories of Childhood

"No flesh of my flesh, nor bone of my bone,

but still miraculously my own."

A young Manitoban Aboriginal Woman is pregnant and has a decision to make. Her unborn child is the result of an extramarital affair, a status irreconcilable with the beliefs and values of her community. If the details of her pregnancy are revealed, she will undoubtedly face considerable condemnation. Keep the child, abort the child, or place the child for adoption. These are her options, and she chooses the latter. The year is 1971 and the young woman decides to leave her community to conceal her pregnancy. The community is told that she has moved to Calgary to work as a hairdresser, and once in Calgary, this is exactly what she does: work as a hairdresser and await the birth of her child. The child is born and mother leaves back to Manitoba, never having held her baby boy in her arms. Five days later, the baby is cradled in the arms of his newly adoptive parents; they name him Calvin.

This is Calvin's understanding of how be came to be adopted. It is also Calvin's understanding that his birth mother specifically asked that he be placed in a White adoptive home. This, she believed, would provide her child with greater opportunities than he would have received if raised on the reserve. Accordingly, Calvin was adopted by Steve and Bonnie, a White, middle-class couple, who at the time of his adoption already had two children of their own, Ian (four years older than Calvin), and Tammy (one year older than Calvin.). Two years after Calvin's adoption, Steve and Bonnie had another child, Luke. Calvin believes that his parent's decision

to adopt an Aboriginal child was influenced by Bonnie's parents who adopted a five-year-old Aboriginal child. At the time of this adoption, Bonnie was already near adulthood, so the two did not grow up as siblings per se.

Life for Calvin as an Aboriginal infant placed in a White middle-class family began as it does for many children. He recalls loving parents, playful siblings, numerous pets, and a baby book in which his mother inscribed the following poem. This, she had him commit to memory:

"No flesh of my flesh, nor bone of my bone,

but still miraculously my own.

Never forget for a single minute,

you didn't go under my heart, but in it."

Calvin recalls his childhood as a time of happiness, love, and belonging: "Lots of love, lots of toys – big family coming over all of the time. I never felt outside, on the outside being Native." Calvin was made to feel unconditionally accepted by his adoptive family. Never did he feel any semblance of exclusion: his parents were his parents, his siblings were his siblings. "Close" is the word Calvin uses to describe his family, and he says that this closeness perseveres today, even though his siblings live in different regions across North America.

At school, things were as at home. Calvin recalls that he made friends easy and had many of them, regardless of what grade he was in. Some of these friends, he says, have remained life-long friends. As he first began formal schooling, Calvin recalls already being aware that he was Aboriginal and adopted, of this, his mother made sure. Yet, it wasn't until he experienced teasing from older school peers that he

realized that having a different skin colour was looked upon by some as a negative standing. Calvin recalls being called "Paki" in school, but states that such treatment did not overly upset him.

> It wasn't really a huge issue. Ah, about the first time I really got an indication I was physically different, was maybe grade five or six, I had some older guys call me "Paki". And it was just, "Well he's not, so we can call him that. We know that he's not." It used to bother me then, but up until that point, like, there was no real difference.

In elementary school, Calvin remembers attracting unfavorable attention from his teachers, but says that this was due to an undiagnosed attention deficit problem, not his racial background.

> I, um, was labeled obviously with attention deficit disorder. It wasn't actually called that back then, but I finished off my work early and would be disruptive. And so I did a lot at home through the enrichment programs.

As a child, Calvin's world was a White world. Bonnie, sensing that it would be important for Calvin to have an understanding of his cultural heritage, attempted to teach him what she understood to be Aboriginal culture. Reflecting back, Calvin sees these attempts as well intentioned, though lacking in scope and authenticity.

> She used to talk to me, you know, give me what limited information she knew about Native people in the Hollywood sense. Tell me about moccasins or a papoose – all these things that were traditionally associated, but very unaligned with any pristine culture.

Stories of Adolescence

"All I ever saw was the super shaman you see in movies, or the street corner native. Who am I in that?"

As Calvin reached adolescence, his mother continued her efforts to familiarize him with Aboriginal culture. Calvin recalls that she encouraged him to attend Powwows but with little success, as the hip, suavely dressed teen shrugged off her

attempts on the pretense that he was too "cool" to attend such events. At age fourteen, Bonnie's persistence paid off. Calvin attended his first Powwow, though not with the result she had hoped for.

> She'd ask to see if I wanted to go to a Powwow and I remember just being closed. When I did go, you fear what you are not familiar with. So that's what it was, it was just unfamiliar. Even going to my first Powwow I remember not knowing how I fit in with these people. They were strange, and although I knew I was…Aboriginal, but I never thought that I could be Powwow dancing, it never crossed my mind. Um, I didn't have the stigma at that time of what a drunken Indian was, that came later. But I think it's kind of like when you have a police officer come into your school every year and they do the ceremony of getting to know you in the community. You see the uniform, you learn to feel more comfortable when you learn what the police officers do when they are talking to you, right, and that's what they're doing a presentation about. I never even had that for Aboriginal people around me, didn't even have any Aboriginal friends.

Amongst ancestral kin, yet feeling like a stranger. This was Calvin's first exposure to other Aboriginal peoples and it scared him. The absence of Aboriginal people in his life bred unfamiliarity, and unfamiliarity in turn bred fear. For the adolescent Calvin, it was difficult to conceive how he might possibly fit in with these people, who to him were akin to foreigners.

With her son's hesitant response, Bonnie decided not to push the cultural agenda further, and Calvin proceeded on, fully embracing his White adolescent life. Rather than bring Calvin closer to his culture, the Powwow experience pushed him away. But at the time, this was okay. He was doing well at school, he had many friends – he had a loving family. What he didn't have was an idea of where he "fit in" with Aboriginal people. As an adolescent, Calvin became aware of two basic stereotypical Aboriginal identities, neither of which encouraged him to seek further

communion with this aspect of self, for neither instilled pride and acceptance of his heritage:

> I was never proud of it! I hated being Aboriginal growing up. All I ever saw was the super shaman you see in movies, or the street corner native. Who am I in that?

Unable to relate to either of the Aboriginal stereotypes, Calvin was harshly rejecting of his Aboriginal heritage altogether. He describes feelings of insecurity and dissonance in regard to being Aboriginal, again, brought about by a constricted stereotypical view of what it could mean to be Aboriginal.

> Like its not obvious to tell when a young man is insecure, and you know, …and ah, you can take a few guesses on why a young Aboriginal man is that way. And ah, a good guess would be that he's just not comfortable with his culture, his self, his identity, you know, how the popular media portrays it.

During his high school years, the incongruency between Calvin's outward Aboriginal appearance, and the lack of relevant Aboriginal role models, lead him to try to conceal his racial identity.

> I would probably try to, ah, hide my identity, my hair, ah, at some point people, you know, would have probably thought I was Malaysian. That sort of thing. Um, I always tried to dress as the cool kids did, you know, sort of thing. Um, it was all appearance, a façade. You know, so I had to maintain things.

If not concealing his identity, Calvin was more comfortable joking about it, rather than asserting this aspect of self.

> I used to joke around with my culture. I remember certain instances where I would use it as a humourous anecdote and I could do the Native impression. We played this game all through high school, it was called the buffalo jump. And basically we had these benches. They were just flat benches and they would maybe sit five people across. And I used to tell a story about the buffalo jump. And I used to indicate which direction the buffalo jump was to be. And then I would basically the keyword I'd say one, two, three, and so I'd say, you know, "The Native people would hunt the buffaloes first with the bows and arrows, then with the spear, and then the third, and then they'd know this was coming, the third was the buffalo jump. And as I said that,

> everyone knew, because everyone was in on the gag, except for the person on the end, would know to slide down as fast and as hard as they can, and they would literally eject the person off the end of the bench.

Humour allowed emotional distance between Calvin and his Aboriginal heritage. At times, perhaps if passing by an Aboriginal person living on the street, this humour could turn to disdain.

> You go downtown and people would ask you, people would ask me for change and, "I pay too much in taxes to give you money," you know, some indifferent answer, "I've only got a hundred on me."
>
> I used to have no time for conversation. If they asked "So where are you from?" "I gotta go."

For Calvin, the street corner drunk was an imposing and disconcerting image of Aboriginal identity. Calvin's mother warned him of such a fate, hoping that doing so would prevent it from ever occurring. Calvin was confident it would not, and to prove this – and to prove that he wasn't truly "Indian", at about age sixteen, Calvin took to drinking.

> It started when I was drinking, you know when I was sixteen to eighteen. I think that I drank just to prove I wasn't Indian [laughter] The truth of that is that I became my worst fear, the street-corner Native. It's interesting. I always had lots of friends and I always used to go out and hang out. I would drink as much as I could, you know, with them.
>
> How would drinking prove that you weren't Native?
>
> Oh because they say that Natives can't handle their liquor, so if I drank just as much as they did, all right, then that broke down that, but meanwhile I'm staggering and slurring. Quite jokingly, I would say "Oh, I went and got a little Indian there."

Trying to prove he wasn't Indian brought Calvin closer to the stereotype that he and his mother feared. Staggering home drunk became a familiar scene. But intoxication served a second purpose. Though growing up wasn't overly painful,

there was pain, and this pain was serviced through alcohol and marijuana. Calvin isn't sure what contributed to his adolescent angst. He wonders about issues relevant to identity, and the possible emotional impact of his mother's decision to place him for adoption. Whatever it's origin, he knows that remnants of it still linger, and believes that one day he may have greater understanding.

> I think we smoked pot often as well. It was just a way of escaping, you know, some of the pain. I can't really say it was painful being me growing up, but, ah, you never know about these abandonment issues. I still haven't fully explored that. Um, and you don't know about the, um, identity crisis. I'd imagine maybe ten years from now I'll have a better idea of how much it effected me. But at least I recognize that it's still a struggle because of these things.

Noticing their son's struggle, Calvin's parents sought a remedy. They believed the answer lay in Calvin's severed relationship with his birth mother, and thought that locating her would afford family as well as cultural reunification. Reconnection did occur at age eighteen, but tragedy would soon follow. At age nineteen, at the end of a night of drinking and partying in downtown Calgary, a street fight ensued with a fatal conclusion.

> Well it happened down on Electric Avenue. Um, he was the first I think of three homicides, of that year. Um, me and a friend, his name is Brad, and another friend, her name is Pam, um, were walking back to our car when we got jumped by three other guys. And ah, the girl got punched out. My friend wound up getting punched out, and then the attack turned on me. Um, I wound up producing a weapon, which was a knife, and showing it to them to keep them off. And ah, there was even court documents indicating that they all knew that I had one, and warned their one friend to not to go near me, he's got a knife. And ah, but he chose to beat me up which he did, he gave me a pretty good hiding. And ah, I stabbed him in the arm, um, his punching arm, and um, he bled to death from a puncture wound – severed a vein. He bled to death fairly quickly, I guess. And ah, I guess I fled the scene, drove home. Um, later got arrested and I guess sitting in the police interview room, which is a white room maybe just big enough to fit two of these couches, um, that was my, I guess loss of innocence right there.

It took two years before the legal process found Calvin guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced him to two years less a day. Although his lawyers believed that they could obtain an acquittal, Calvin chose to assume responsibility for what he had done.

> They still believed that they could get me off. But I figured I should accept guilt, accept responsibility for my actions. Ah, there's no word for guilty in my traditional language, it's "I am responsible for." So, while I don't believe I am guilty for it, I am responsible for it. So, I took that action and got two years less one day.

Calvin says that his family was supportive from the outset, doing what they could to clear his name and help him move beyond this tragic event. But it was not easy on his parents. Calvin's recalls that his father, whom he says has always exuded qualities of emotional strength and stability, was particularly devastated at his son's misfortune.

> My mom had told me that when they took me away for sentencing, my father, he was basically dragged. You know, he's always been such a strong strong man. And he literally, through being upset or just worried, you know, as he was leaving the courtroom he just sort of, you know, dropped down. He was just so upset, you know, about his son. His son's life is ruined.

Stories of Young Adulthood

"I look back and see all the mistakes I've made,

and on this particular day I can smile."

There is much to be fearful of in a penal institution. For the twenty-one year old Calvin, one of his most salient fears was the close contact he would now have with other Aboriginal people, for the prisons are vastly over-represented with individuals from this sector of Canada's population (McMillan, 1995). Calvin recalls that part of his fear involved physical safety, and part was attributable to what he had

always feared and what had instilled a pronounced bias against his people: fear of the unknown.

> Um, well I remember the guy who was in the cell next to me, he absolutely petrified me. He never said anything. He was probably about six foot two or six foot three, and ah… it always looked like he was pissed off. Um, when he was younger his older brother tattooed a cross right in his forehead, so that further mystified me. And a lot of Native guys seemed to have that, too, so I thought that this was some sort of gang thing. Um, but ah… Anyways, this guy I would never say a word to him. Probably the last couple days, you know, the last month before I was out, you know, we were friends. He would show me different stuff. It was just a nice atmosphere to ah, talk and spend some time with these people. Its good, you know, because they're not all getting self-medicated and all that. So it's a, it's a fairly good opportunity….he definitely enabled me to get over my fear of, you know tough Indian guy you see.

Just spending time with other Aboriginal people increased Calvin's degree of comfort, and thereby decreased his fear and apprehension. What he says he realized during his incarceration was that despite his upbringing, and despite what he might have previously thought, he was no different than the other Aboriginal inmates who had strayed.

> Everyone was in there for one reason or another. Ah, I was…well I didn't consider anyone really a mentor in there…I…just realized that I was no better, I think is a better way of putting it.

Prison was where Calvin took his first steps toward learning more about his culture. In prison he attended his first sweat lodge, and through the cultural programming, learned the proper procedures involved in Aboriginal custom and spiritual practice.

> It gave me, ah, a basic understanding on how to go about things, how to ah, participate – protocols, that sort of thing. Once you get past the protocols of being able to access elders or teachings or do the prayers, and all that, it's a, it's a lot easier.

After his release, Calvin was determined to pick up the pieces of his life and move forward. In part this meant enrolling in university and successfully completing a Bachelor of Arts degree. Since graduation, Calvin has worked at a variety of jobs, mostly involving community development and cultural liaison work. He has been very successful in these endeavours, though acknowledges that the nature of his employment over the years has been sustaining of a White identity. Herein, Calvin concedes that at this time, it is within a White-Western culture that he feels most comfortable, though to some extent he is able to able to walk in "both worlds".

> I realize that my journey is within a non-Native culture. I have a very good ability to walk in both worlds and make people feel comfortable. And it's getting better – I am better at dealing with the non-Native community right now than the Native community which is getting better each day. So one day I want to see it balanced, because right now it's about a 60-40 split, if I could describe it that way, 60 being in the non-Native culture.

Calvin classifies himself, as an "apple" – red on the outside, White on the inside. This classification is acceptable to Calvin, in fact he states that he is proud to be an apple in that it has given him the advantage of being able to operate within White culture for the benefit of Aboriginal people.

> I do recognize that I am Aboriginal, but I can't help who I am, and I am a combination of both, and I know that I can use this non-Native system to my advantage now, to see results done for the Aboriginal people.

Calvin's dual Aboriginal-White identity and his propensity to use this identity to his advantage is reflected in his ability to adjust his self-presentation according to social context.

> Basically we're chameleons – we can fit in where we want to. I'll find myself even using a slight native accent at times and dressing differently, that sort of thing. All depends on who I am with and where I am.

Calvin's ability to move between two cultures as an adult is reminiscent of his ability as an adolescent to move between various peer groups. At the time, Calvin found this ability extremely useful, though today thinks that it interferes with his self-acceptance.

> I made it more of my task to be the chameleon, to be able to fit in with just about any group out there. And so it's, it's kind of been an adaptation skill or technique. But what it has left me with in my adult years is someone who, ah, you know, I think still demonstrates that he's not fully comfortable with himself.

Although he is content with his "apple" identity, there seems to be an unease that accompanies the fluidity of his self-presentation. Hence, Calvin's search for a sense of self that he can comfortably live with is ongoing.

> In essence it's just trying to figure out who I am. And I would say I think everyone goes through that ongoing throughout their life. But it's, at this stage of my life I realize that I'm still very much in that search. I'm at my best when I truly am myself.

When Calvin thinks of a person who models the type of stability and self-acceptance he aspires to, he turns to his father.

> Everyone changes according to the situation, but, ah, it's well-balanced people like my father who could just always be themselves that seemed to do well and be most successful.

For Calvin, an important aspect of being more truly himself involves further immersion into Aboriginal culture, such that he can incorporate traditional values into the White western society in which he lives.

> The important value is being able to learn some of the culture. You know, I can learn how to survive in the city, and ah, learn how to be an urban Native person – I think I've done well at that. But I haven't learned to the level that satisfies me, how to incorporate some of the traditional values. I'm not saying that I'm going to be a traditional Native person. I don't think that's realistic for me. But I want to be able to have that knowledge base to be able to incorporate modern day living with some of the traditional values.

Prior to his stay in prison, Calvin had virtually no connection with his cultural heritage, and little interest in remedying this. He saw himself as different from other Aboriginals, who, in his view, were aligned with undesirable stereotypes. Aboriginal people were akin to foreigners, and unfamiliarity encouraged uncertainty and fear, which in turn encouraged negative bias and rejection. Following his time in prison, this began to change. Learning about centuries of colonial oppression brought forth feelings of anger and resentment toward White culture, and for a while, he rebelled against it. However, a hostile rejection of White culture would mean having to reject his parents, and for Calvin, this was out of the question.

> It's interesting. I went from being prejudiced or biased against natives to being overly proud to be native: You're White – this and we don't need anymore of your paternal, you know, really mad at non-Native people – even mad at my own family sometimes. And now it's swung back, that I can't be that because it's disrespectful to my family.

At first Calvin turned to books to learn more about his culture, though over the past five years, this has changed as he increasingly draws upon the teachings of Elders and ceremonial experiences. I asked about his ability to overthrow the fears that had once hindered his interest and involvement in learning about traditional Aboriginal culture.

> The best way to understand Aboriginal culture is just to persevere. Kind of dive in with both hands, you know, or up to your waist in the mud, and eventually someone is going to recognize the effort.

Calvin speaks favourably of his progression toward greater cultural understanding, though he believes that the key to this educational experience lies in the hands of his birth mother.

> My mother, she's a Sundancer, and that's something I've been aspiring to for twenty-eight years, let say. So as far as a culture person, she's probably my answer. And she learned from my grandmother which she is now offering something for me, to listen to get rid of all my inhibitions, fears, thoughts, and just listen to what she has to say.

Unfortunately, Calvin's aspirations to learn from his birth mother, along with his desire to build a stronger relationship with his birth family, is constrained by the same secret that led him to be adopted in the first place. To the family back in Manitoba, he does not exist other than in the guise of "the son of a close friend in Calgary", which is how he was introduced on a recent trip back.

> I'll be going back home in the capacity of – the son of a good friend in Calgary. So, in essence, I'm…she still has to work through that - my introduction into the community. And I used to see that as a favourable event. It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter as much anymore. I was mad that I couldn't go to my grandmother's funeral or talk to grandmother before she passed on. I'm now in a much better place.

To be so close to the family reconnection that he so desires, but having to operate on someone else's timetable is frustrating for Calvin. The stalled process resonates with the disquiet surrounding his mother's decision to place him for adoption in the first place. However in the last year, Calvin has largely been able to overcome these difficult feelings, and move to a place of understanding and acceptance.

> I just basically came to terms with it. I guess there's still a little bit of, um…what's it called uh… there's still some underlying issues that I'm still trying to understand about being abandoned. Um, I recognize that they're there, um, whereas before I pretended that I just didn't care. Um…what am I trying to describe um…I'm very – I may have said this last time, I am very thankful for what my birth mom was able to do for me. She carried me to term and she gave me my first and best gift – that's life. And um, I owe her my life for that. And um, it took me a long time to even appreciate that much, because, you know, I was always like, you know, poor me, or, you know, obviously she didn't want me. I never even got to that degree, but, you know, um…I guess what I figured in the last little bit, in the last year or so, was that I

> owe her a debt, and that's why I'll respect her wishes and what she has to say to me. And, if things work out great I'm pleased. And if she's unable to come and visit me or unable to show me some of the traditional ways…that's fine, too. You know, I got some time still until I become impatient, I guess, but ah, eventually.

Calvin also has plans to reconnect with his birth father, who to this day does not know that he even has a son (or at least not Calvin). Calvin is quite sure he knows his father's identity, and says that one question to his birth mother will likely confirm his speculation. In keeping with Calvin's humorous nature, he plans to enlighten his father in dramatic fashion.

> I imagine sitting down, um… or going into some sort of , someone's house and seeing a bunch of Native men playing poker around the table, and I'll just walk in, sit down and ask to be dealt in. And then as we're holding our cards, I'll say "Hey dad, how's it going?" And ah, it ah [laughs], I expect all the native men around the table to be trembling just a little bit.

Taking another man's life can weigh heavy on one's conscience, and so it is for Calvin. He finds the anniversary of the death a particularly difficult time, as is the Christmas season with its anti-drinking and driving television commercials depicting the distraught mothers of children killed by impaired drivers. For Calvin, these serve as cold reminders of the life that he took, and the legacy of sadness and loss, for the surviving family members.

> Um, well around August 15 or Christmas time, you know, you hear those mothers against drunk driving commercials and stuff like that, um, about how… Um, the first year it wasn't so bad because they were so numb from the loss of losing a loved one, and then the next year the first time they felt it, it got worse. So you're hearing the mother's um, plea to stop drinking and driving, but I take it on a personal level, you know, because I certainly expect that there's a mother out there who feels the same way, um, understandably, and as a result of me.

For many years, Calvin carried a heavy burden of guilt for the life he had taken. Only recently, through the support of a counsellor, has he been able to achieve a sense of peace and resolution for what he had done.

> Ah, just recently, um, last Christmas I got rid of all the guilt involved with that. Um, I, ah, I decided that happiness is a choice and I've been living with the burden of this particular individual and the suffering of his family on my back for like way too long. And um, it's not mine anymore. I feel poorly and it still can be difficult, but I refuse to um, let this bother me, and becoming an effecting factor in my life, I guess.

Releasing himself from the emotional vestige of that fatefully tragic night has helped Calvin to move forward. He recognizes his capability to do good in his lifetime, and is determined to realize this potential. Fully aware that he cannot turn back the past, Calvin endeavours to make the most of his present and future.

> Well, I don't think there's really anything that I can do about it. I've done all that I can. I think that I've lived my life well since. And um, it's just a matter of getting over it.

Living well has also afforded Calvin the satisfaction of being able to assuage the fears and worries of his parents, who at one time, Calvin believes, thought their son's life was terminally ruined by the tragic killing.

> It's just a really special treat and wonderful feeling to be able to go over and tell my dad, "Well, guess what? I'm working for the emergency services doing cultural diversity."

Giving back to his culture and community is extremely important to Calvin, not only in a professional capacity, but also as a volunteer who mentors youth and speaks at various functions and conferences.

> I've only recently decided to go public. I figured there's a story that can help out some people. I don't pretend I want to go into social work or community work, but I certainly do want to be able to, um, help out the younger generation. Mistakes are made. Sometimes you just have to pay the price for

> these things. But you can still, you can still accomplish a lot of things. For a while there they were going to have me sit on the police commission.

For Calvin, learning about Aboriginal culture and history, along with participation in traditional ceremonies, helped him to become proud, and hence accepting, of his Aboriginal identity. This, in turn, is what Calvin now conveys to the young people whom he mentors.

> Basically what I relate to a young person now is, try to help them understand that they should be proud of who they are. And ah, not to beat yourself up over, you know, trivial things. There's a lot bigger things in life. And we're given all these problems in life to challenge us. And ah, it's our choice what we do with these challenges..... I know a lot of Aboriginal youth have no idea what the previous generation had gone through. And there are very few older role models – Aboriginal people who can really, um, look up to. But, we kind of look at our mentors or our role models as people who are supposed to be perfection, when in actual fact they're not. They are people who experience things in life ahead of you.
>
> We still stand here today. We still have our language. We still have our culture. We still have the traditional values. So in other words, when my Elder hands me the pipe, that is why I'm so proud to understand that they've come through and survived it. So I can smoke it.

Although Calvin strives to help Aboriginal youth become proud of their Aboriginal heritage, and by implication, to challenge racist discourse by doing so, he maintains that in his experience he has faced very few direct acts of racism. Calvin recalls that as a child because of his dark skin, hair, and eyes, older children called him "Paki", but this did not interfere with his experience of being accepted by his peers.

> I always thought I was well liked, and I didn't have anyone, you know, look down upon me.

As an adult, Calvin's says that his encounters with racism have likewise been minimal. What little he has experienced is quickly and effectively managed either through ignoring it, or confronting it in a clear, yet composed manner.

> I would have to say that I have faced very little racism in my life. Either I just don't pay attention to it, or it generally doesn't matter to me. If someone were to have an issue with me because I'm Native, well that's fine. It's good – I can just walk away, you know, it's fine. And some people their racism is more subtle, but I can talk to them about it, because, you know I'll get the "No, you're not like all the other Indians, you're a good Indian", you know. "Well thank you for the comment", but its inaccurate.

At age twenty-eight year, Calvin is uncertain of his future. He has thoughts of returning to school to study law, but wonders if he has the requisite "stick-to-it-ness" to see this through. For now, he continues to enjoy considerable success in his work in cultural diversity. As he reflects back at his life, Calvin sees the mistakes he has made, and admits that on some days this does weigh heavy. Despite the weight, Calvin does not collapse; instead, he concludes that all can be well, and that on this day he can smile.

> I look back and see all the mistakes I've made, and on this particular day I can smile. There's good days and bad days, right.

Karen's Story

Stories of Childhood

"At the back of the hospital."

A young British couple excitedly enters the hospital anticipating their first glimpse of the infant child they will soon adopt. However, instead of stopping at the nursery where most babies lay squirming, crying, or sleeping, in their bassinets, they continue walking to the back of the hospital until they reach a sign that reads "unadoptables." This is where they find the child that they will soon call their own, amongst other infants of non-White or mixed racial heritage whom society has deemed undesirable.

> They had to walk all the way through the hospital to the back to the unadoptable section, and we were called unadoptables because we were of mixed heritage. Times have changed – thank God.

Karen's earliest experience of being a person in this world was one of separation and exclusion based solely on her cultural and racial heritage. This experience, however, would not endure.

Karen was born in June of 1966 to an Aboriginal mother and father of Irish descent. Together they decided that it was in their infant daughter's best interest to be placed for adoption, and so she was. Three weeks into her life Karen was adopted by Damien and Myra, two British schoolteachers who had recently immigrated to Canada. The couple already had one child together, Emily, and upon learning that they could have no more, decided to adopt two infants. Karen, who is four years younger than Emily, was adopted first, followed by Ken, who is one year younger than Karen. Ken is also of bi-racial heritage, though not of Aboriginal descent.

Damien and Myra were specific in wanting to adopt children of colour. Their desire, Karen says, was to provide an opportunity to seemingly less fortunate children, rather than adopt "perfect little blond hair blue-eyed babies", as was the preference of so many other parents.

> They knew when my mom couldn't have any more kids that they were going to adopt. And they also wanted to adopt kids who may not have opportunities otherwise presented to themselves. Um, so situations such as mine and my brother's was perfect for them because they're, they're really caring giving people. And they could have gotten in line for the perfect little blond haired blue-eyed kid – which actually my brother was, but anyway [laughter], at the front of the hospital they could have just gone in and um, they're both teachers and they could have gotten first pick, you know, so to speak, at that time. But they choose to go in and maybe give a little child an opportunity that they wouldn't have had. So they did discuss that way back in '66, and they have discussed it since with my brother and I, about it. So, it's like well, you know you could have gotten whoever, but they, just wanted to give someone an opportunity – which I totally got.

As a young professional couple, Damien and Myra could have adopted any child, yet they chose to adopt children of mixed racial heritage. Karen reflects that her parents did so likely knowing that there would be people – perhaps even family members – who would disapprove.

> I'm sure mom and dad being British, English, that their family kind of went "whoa" because they are very upper-crusty [laugh]. And um, for my mom and dad to go and do that, I think among the bias of that age and time, um, I think is pretty, pretty interesting for them to be able to do that. Because mom and dad they are very British, and if you think of the British people that's more mom than dad, but, they're very British. So for them to not worry about what the other people thought and to do it, it's hard to explain, but I know in the British culture, they're very, you know, this is the way it is, this is the way it is, kind of thing. For mom and dad to adopt a native person, I'm sure they kind of went "whoa, are you sure?" But they never said that. Mom and dad never said that people were worried about it.

Although the possibility existed that Damien and Myra would face disapproval or reproach for adopting bi-racial children, this did not happen. Nor was

Karen ever made to feel less a family member because of her adopted and mixed racial status. Her experience was always that of an equal member of the family. Full acceptance was offered by her siblings, parents, and extended family.

As a child, Karen knew she was adopted, and knew she was Aboriginal – of this her parents made sure. However, it was not until she began school that she learned that being Aboriginal was viewed by some as a negative standing, that her racial heritage was something other children might tease her about. Naïve to this, Karen readily told her classmates that she was Aboriginal.

> I was more aware of it when I started going to school, so five to six years old. Um, because that's when the teasing started, right, with the other kids. So they would start teasing because, obviously I told them all I was, I mean I didn't care. So that's when some of the other kids made you aware, "Hey you're Indian", "Hey Squaw", "Hey, you going to scalp me", the usual stuff, right. Um, so that's when I first became kind of more aware of it, because I never thought of it before – I just was. So then when you are with all your friends, peers at school, that's when you think about it a little bit more. You know, I never got treated differently by the teachers that I was aware of, but it was more the schoolmates.

As a young child, being of Aboriginal descent was largely inconsequential to Karen. She did not notice it or think about herself as being different. This changed, however, when she began school. As the only Aboriginal child in her elementary school, Karen recalls her peers, mainly boys, soon learned that racial taunts would lead her to take chase, which is, Karen believes, exactly what they wanted. Even at the time, Karen sensed that the name-calling was more to do with playground antics than an affront to her identity as an Aboriginal person.

> It never made me cry. Right, like it never hurt my feelings that I would go cry. It would make me mad in a way, but on one level I knew they were just trying to tease me – get me going, right. So it wasn't in a super mean vindictive ignorant way. But now that you look at it, it's like, well of course it was – who goes around calling people squaw? But at the time it was more like I knew they just wanted me to chase them.

Although she attributed the name-calling to prankish teasing, it did grow tiresome and irritating after awhile. As a child, Karen looked very Aboriginal, and as she moved into her early teens, peers continued to address her by racist names. This led Karen to issue a stronger statement to one particular peer, who insisted on calling her "squaw".

> I did look quite native when I was younger, right. Like, long dark hair and everything. Um, but then in high school I cracked my friend over the head with a tennis racket. I told him I was going to, too. Because, in grade six-seven-eight, I think, the guys were still calling me squaw. And um, I just remember my one friend in gym class, he's like "Hey squaw" and I go "you call me that again and I'm going to crack you over the head – we were playing tennis together – so he called me squaw and I hit him as hard as I could with my tennis racket. He didn't cry, but I knew he wanted to.

In times of threat, Karen did not always have to fend on her own. When she was in elementary school her older sister, Emily, was quick to offer protection should her little sister be the subject of harassment.

> My sister was very protective of me. At school, I remember when kids would tease me. Um, like even when I was younger she was very protective of me, like "leave my sister alone".
>
> I just remember like in the elementary school – that's grade one to six – she was gone when I was in grade three, she was already in grade seven. But I must have been in grade either one or two when somebody said something to me about being a squaw, I think it might have been one of her friends actually, ya, there was a boy that lived down the street and he was a big bully, everyone was scared of him. And she said, like, "Leave my sister alone", or something like that, and then grabbed me.

With her big sister available to defend, and a large group of friends, Karen felt confident and secure as a young child attending school. Although she was the only Aboriginal child in her school, Karen does not recall her teachers treating her any different than other children. If she did attract negative attention, it was due to her rambunctious behaviour, not her Aboriginal heritage.

> I don't recall anybody treating me different or talking to me about being Native. I just used to get in trouble for carrying the big people around. I used to give people piggybacks to show them how strong I was. And I got in trouble in elementary school from my teacher for carrying around my sister, because she was big and tall and I was just this little shrimpo thing.

If extra attention was directed toward Karen, it was done so in a way that left her, if anything, feeling proud to be Aboriginal.

> No one ever singled me out. However, there were times in social for show and tell – and maybe it's because I did bring my Indian stuff – but the teachers found that quite fascinating that I had genuine authentic Native, like, this medicine man's hat, it's just the most phenomenal thing, and um, my mom and dad had everything. So I used to always bring it for show and tell and the teachers really liked that it wasn't bought in Banff, it was authentic. So they used to ask me to bring this stuff for show and tell. But, it was because I had already brought some cool stuff. I mean it's, "Okay, you're Native, you must have some cool stuff at home." I think it's because I had already brought real stuff.

Karen recalls childhood growing up in a White adoptive home as a time of infinite fun and adventure. Karen's parents were nature-loving people who introduced their children at an early age to skiing, hiking, camping and other athletic and outdoor pursuits. They also had, even before Karen was adopted, a close affinity to Aboriginal culture. And thus part of their relationship with the outdoors and the natural world included a close and meaningful relationship with Aboriginal people and their culture. This connection to Aboriginal culture became an integral part of family life woven into the fabric of their everyday living.

> I was brought up, like we always had um, instead of a tent in our back yard we always had a teepee. We had tons of native artifacts in our home. Um, mom and dad had native friends that used to come by the house all the time. We had an Indian sled dog as a pet – half wolf, half Indian sled dog. Um, boy, like we would go camping and stay with the Indian people – Northern Alberta or Saskatchewan, or wherever we went. So I was always exposed to the culture. Knowing that mom and dad weren't Native, of course, but that I was. I remember I got to ride with a chief on his horse and he was all done up in his

> feathers. I was probably about four or five at the time. We have a picture of me, I was just like beaming, it was so cool.

Symbols of Aboriginal culture pervaded Karen's home life. Outside the home, she and her family maintained meaningful social relationships with Aboriginal people. Karen recalls a sense of genuineness to the family's Aboriginal affiliations. The ride with the chief was not a contrived "pay to sit with the chief" event. The family has been out hiking in the wilderness when they happened upon the authentic encampment.

> It was for real and I think I understood back then that it was for real. It wasn't like Stampede and go sit with a cowboy or Indian. It was for real, and I think that's what made it exciting for me. Even when I was that young I still remember the feeling of excitement.

As a child, Karen recalls that it was important to her that her involvement in the Aboriginal community was "real", which is the way she always remembers it: real life experiences within rural and reserve Aboriginal communities. Karen's father was instrumental in planning such events, and did so not only for his family, but for his university students as well. Karen remembers the family accompanying the students who would spend days living with Aboriginal people while learning of their traditional ways.

> That was through actually my dad and the university. Ah, because dad started the outdoor pursuits program there, thirty years ago. And we went as a family with him on his outings with the university students, and we would go actually on sweats with elders and stay. I don't know if it was on the reserve, or they just set up Teepees, but we would go and spend like four or five days with these Natives, and cook with the Natives, do sweats with the Natives.

Karen's close affinity with Aboriginal culture gave rise to an identity that unquestioningly subsumed this aspect of her racial heritage. Karen never recalls her

parents sitting her down to try and explain the meaning of being Native. She seemed to just know that she was, and that this was something that she could be proud about.

> It was always a feeling of this is where I am, this is where I came from, right, this is cool. You know, but um, I mean mom and dad, I don't know if they made an effort to do this or if it's just a part of them in having all the Native artifacts. Like dad had a medicine man's hat in our house and we used to wear it around, a big buffalo thing, it was amazing. That was given to him by elders somewhere. But mom and dad have always had a connection with the Native community. Um, I don't know if it was because they got me. I don't think so. I think they had that connection before. Um, I mean there was more of a connection when I came along. Um, but it's just always been around – the Native culture with us.

For Karen, participation and communion with Aboriginal culture was a natural part of family life. Her parents learnt some Cree; her mother made bannok; her older sister was the first to receive the much sought after beaded leather jacket. The culture was not set forth as a special offering to Karen because she was Native, it was something for all to experience and appreciate.

> Things were just done. I don't know, it's hard to explain, but we were just…everything was a family and it wasn't just because Karen was Native we were going to see this Native guy. It was like, okay, we want some more deer meat or something, so we'll go, we'll go see whatever his name is. I didn't even like deer meat.
>
> If we were camping or something in B.C. and dad heard of a Powwow, mom and dad, then we'd go and watch. Or like Native Rodeos or whatever, even from a younger age, we would always go. It was pretty neat. I think we went to some in Montana, too, when we went down there. I don't think he went "Oh there's a Pow Wow, we should go for Karen." It was more like, "Hey guys, there's a Pow Wow and there's going to be dancing and…" and we would just go. It's funny, eh, two English people, proper English people…

With an accumulation of enjoyable and rewarding cultural experiences, Karen became proud of her Aboriginal heritage. She was not told she should be proud, she just was.

> They've never spoken down about the Native culture, they've never, they've never said anything negative about it. And I think the way they presented it was as a proud culture. And um, that I should be proud to be part of it. I've always been proud of it.
>
> They've never said, you know you should be proud of this la la la. They've never done that. I can't see them doing that. That wouldn't be them. They would let me discover things for myself, rather than tell me how I should feel.

The manner in which Karen's family participated within the Aboriginal community meant that Karen was consistently exposed to positive Aboriginal role models. This, in turn, became the foundation for her own Aboriginal identity.

> When mom and dad took us out to the Native communities what we saw were hard working, um, typical roles, you know, the husbands, the males out hunting, the females cooking, doing bead-work. Um, those were the typical roles that I saw when I got out of the city environment and went to a reserve environment, for example. Whether it be in Western Canada or, um, Churchill, we went up to Churchill, also – and saw a polar bear up there. Um, but, those communities were different. The Natives I saw then were hardworking, you know, surviving.

Exposure to positive Aboriginal role models allowed Karen to develop a healthy Aboriginal identity. However, the tragic reality of the urban Aboriginal plight was still evident. As a child, she saw what many others saw: Aboriginal street people, often begging, often intoxicated. She recalls one occasion where she saw a drunk Aboriginal person hitchhiking on the roadside. She asked her parents to explain his state, wondering if this man was representative of all Aboriginal people.

> I think I recall a conversation, I don't know how old I was, eight, maybe, um, when I saw a drunken Indian on the road, and I remember saying something like "Are they all like that?" – meaning like the ones around here, not the ones on the reserve, but the ones like here. And mom and dad they looked at each other and then mom just said, "Oh no dear" or something, but she didn't elaborate. So it was kind of like, you know, I didn't really get an answer. Maybe they were a little bit uncomfortable with the question. It was just an innocent question, and I remember I did not get an answer.

These images confused and bothered Karen. As a child she could not comprehend that an Aboriginal adult, someone who should be a role model, could be setting such a poor example.

> It did bug me. Um, I was a Native and he was a drunk Native guy. And I can't put my emotions or like connecting them right now to how I felt, but it was kind of like – What's he doing? Why is he, why is he, I'm Native and he's making me look bad. I don't know if I thought those exact words, but that's kind of the feeling I had.

Although Karen found these images of Aboriginal people disturbing, her positive Aboriginal identity remained intact.

Karen's identity as a young person involved more than just her Aboriginal heritage. Not only had she been exposed to Aboriginal culture from an early age, she also had been exposed to athletics, an area in which she excelled. Thus, many of Karen's role models growing up were White athletes.

> I've always known every since I was like three years old that I wanted to be like Nancy Green who was, like, Olympic champion, and I wanted to be just like her. And so I had goals already from when I was very young.

Stories of Adolescence

"Growing up with a focus, with dreams..."

Feats of physical prowess came early and easy for Karen. At ten months she was walking; at a year and a half, she was on skis. As a young child there was nothing she liked more than a challenge. Other children would challenge her: "Bet you can't jump off of that fence!" And she did. She would challenge her self: "I wonder if I can climb to the top of that" And she did. At age twelve Karen challenged herself and became a member of a provincial sports team, and then three years later, at age fifteen, Karen secured a major accomplishment by making the Canadian National

Team. Once on the National team, the time commitment at this level of competition required Karen to be away from home for months at a time. This, of course, meant that her formal education was limited to a half course of summer school during the off season. Remarkably, her parents, both schoolteachers, were supportive of Karen's athletic pursuit. From age fifteen on, Karen says that athletics enveloped her entire adolescent life, to a point where she concedes that she really did not have an adolescence, as typically portrayed.

> No, I don't think I really had one. So maybe I missed out on something, like graduation from high school. Everyone else was like, "Oh grad. Oh yay grad – a new life out there". For me it's like, "What are you talking about?" I don't relate that way. You know, and like the teenage problems of smoking and drinking and partying and what to wear and make-up – I never had those issues. I thought they were dumb. So that's why it's kind of – I don't know if maturity is the right word, but, when I hear kids worrying about what to wear and what make-up, to me, it's all trivial. It means nothing to me. For me, personally, there were more important things out there, like, I got to go train, I want to make the world cup, I want to do this, I want to go to the world juniors, rather than worrying about – oh, everyone thinks it's cool to smoke. I was…not even there.

Though some child athletes feel coerced and pressured by parents to be the best, and are forced to sacrifice a more normative life to achieve this end, this was not the case for Karen. She recalls her athletic pursuits were freely chosen and with no regrets.

> I'd do it again in a second. The experiences I got from the life that I had, growing up with a focus, with dreams, with goals that I want to achieve. Compared to little Johnny who goes to school, normal, hangs out with the teenagers after school, tries smoking, maybe tries drugs, maybe gets into partying. I wouldn't trade that for travelling around Europe, making friends all over the world, different cultures, different languages – I was doing well with four different languages, but now they're kind of all gone. But um, experiences when you compare them to growing up, not knowing what you want to do, go to university for four years and take general because you don't know what you want. Or you can actually go travel the world, experience the world, when you come back and you have a different mentality and focus,

> then go to school. That's my idea. Lots of people disagree with me, but I think you should experience the world and not fumble around.

Like many adoptees, when Karen reached her middle teens, she started thinking more about her biological parents. What do they look like? Do they look like me? What physical and personality traits did I inherit? These, Karen explains, were the thoughts that kindled her desire to search for her birth family.

> It would be neat to see, you know, how did I come to be? Who I am body-wise, thinking-wise? Why the hell am I so goal oriented. You know, compared to some of my friends who are "Oh I don't know…". Like, why am I like this?

Turning eighteen allowed Karen to legally search for her birth family. However, due to her commitments to sports, the opportunity to actively search for her biological family did not arise until after she had competed in a world championship sporting event in 1988.

> My original attempt was to just actually look for members of my birth family. The registry focussed on my birth mother. And when I wrote a letter complaining that they didn't look for my birth father, they said he didn't claim paternity. He didn't go to court at the date to claim paternity. However, I know that it was a joint decision from other papers that said that they decided together in the best interest of the child – me – to put her up for adoption. So I know that they spoke about it and he knew about it, but I guess he just didn't make it to court that day. But, um, ya, they focussed the search on the birth mother, and I did write a letter to my birth mother. Um, and the gentleman found her, supposedly, said he had a hunch where she was – whatever that means – gave her the letter, she contacted him back and said that she did not want contact at this time. And I believe it alluded to the fact that she was having marital problems, and that perhaps her husband didn't know about me being adopted, of her having a child before. So, it never panned out, and that was in 1988-89. So she might have changed her mind by now. I'm on a registry but I haven't heard anything yet.

Karen says that she was not overly disappointed that her attempt for reunification was unsuccessful at this time. Nor did she feel slighted by her mother's

unrequited resolve to reconnect. Karen remains on a registry that allows her birthmother to contact her if she decides to do so.

As a teenager, Karen recalls thinking about her birth mother, but not in terms of the familiar adoption themes of rejection or abandonment.

> I know maybe from the papers that I read, or maybe the way my parents presented it to me, I always grew up knowing that this was the best thing for me, this is the best thing that they had to do at that time.
>
> To me, um, and I know that goes against some of the typical adoption responses – adoptee responses, but, I just, I don't believe a mother would ever just go and leave their baby saying "I don't want it, here you take it." I don't believe that's a natural instinct for anybody. I'm sure she feels it every time my birthday comes around. You just don't forget you had a baby. So I know she has to deal with some issues. Every June she's probably going "Oh, my daughter would be turning thirty-five this year [laughter]. So, I know she's got her own stuff that she's going to have to deal with.

Karen grew up with the belief, likely fostered by her parents, that birth parents do not give up their babies due to rejection but due to love. By implication, she looked upon her own adoption as the best decision her birth parents could have made. However, she did wonder at times how life may have been different had she not been adopted, and that it was perhaps regretful that her birth parents chose not to raise her. Even so, Karen remains happy for the opportunities she received through her adoptive upbringing.

> I honestly, I had thoughts, going, oh you know, oh, it's too bad [laugh], kind of thing. But it's always on the other side, it's always like, well, you know what, my life could have been completely, I could have grown up in a – I don't know if she smoked or not, but, could have grown up in a smoking, drunk, alcohol, you know, single native mother raising a child in the city. Who knows, I would never have had those opportunities that I did now. So I just go with looking at everything I got, and it's all positive. And I won't know what my other life would have been like. Maybe it would have been amazing, but, for what I got, it's pretty good. And I know that she – she and he – did the best thing that they had to do at the time. So, and the way I felt

> about it, I think helped me in being a more positive type person. It's kind of like I'm more on the positive side of life than being negative about everything.

Although Karen sometimes wondered what life would have been like if she were raised by her birth mother, she nevertheless is grateful – and thankful – for the opportunities afforded to her through adoption. She wants her birth mother to know this, and that she does not "hate" her for placing her up for adoption. Karen maintains that it would be exciting to meet her Aboriginal family members, yet says that this desire has less to do with a fragmented sense of self, than it does with adding another dimension to her identity.

> Like I kind of just want to go find her for personal reasons to see what I look like and say "Hey thanks, you did a good thing, this isn't a bad thing, I don't hate you." Um, and then meet some of my birth aunties and uncles and siblings – I think that would be really neat. Because there's a whole other family out their that belongs to me, that is my blood, which would be cool to meet one day. But I don't have the typical whole, "Who am?" "Where am I?" "Oh, I'm lost without knowing this." I think it would be and nice addition to my life and seeing these people that I am a part of, but, I mean, if I don't get to meet them, then that's okay…ya…one day.

Stories of Adulthood

"Being brought up in the White, you go the White way."

In 1988 Karen retired from competitive sports and began exploring career options. She initiated the process of becoming a police officer, but was forced to abandon her attempt because of vision impairment. While thinking of what she might try next, Karen spoke to a friend who worked as a social worker in Edmonton. In conversation, her friend suggested she had great aptitude for the profession and encouraged her to consider it as a career. Karen had always been interested in working with youth, so followed her friend's advice and enrolled in social work at a

Calgary area college. Because she never finished high school, before commencing her program Karen had to successfully pass placement exams as a mature student.

Since finishing her diploma in social work, Karen has taken a variety of jobs. She prefers having a number of part-time jobs, rather than one full-time job, because it gives her greater flexibility to pursue her many other interests. Currently Karen works in a fitness club, helps her brother with his carpet cleaning business, coaches skiing, and works part-time in a substance abuse treatment program for Aboriginal youth.

> At this point in my life I got, I don't know, it's all about me. I'm being selfish in my life right now, but, like I said, I'm thirty-four and I want to enjoy my life before I hit fifty and can't do anything [laugh]. No offence mom and dad! But enjoy, I guess my sports while I can, before I don't have to drop down a league or something like that. Um, but I want to, I want to do everything I can right now instead of worrying about working, working, working. I can get work, I can get full-time hours as a relief, and still do what I want to do, right. Go camping when I want to, go experience life while I can and not be stuck in this little bubble of "no you can't go."

Vigorous in her approach to life, Karen is rarely idle. She is active, energetic and engaged. The self-determination that propelled her to become a world class athlete continues to endure. When asked about the force of this drive, she, herself, questions its origin. Karen dismisses the notion that it is an attempt to compensate for feelings of insecurity related to her adoption. Rather, she views it as a personal quality that she has always possessed.

> Well, I've always had thoughts like that in my head. I always wanted to be the best at everything – guys or girls, it didn't matter. You know I wanted to beat the guys because girls weren't of consequence, sounds terrible. Just um, like in physical things I always wanted to beat the guys. I'd always beat the girls, I wanted to beat the guys. Um, but going back even younger, I always remember, I'm going to get to the top of that!

There are many facets to Karen's adult life, one of which includes her Aboriginal identity. Karen recalls that as a child, this was not something she thought much about, in her words it was "just kind of there." Her Aboriginal heritage was not something she had to "deal" with, it did not command her attention, or inform her identity the way that sports did. Today she is much more cognizant of this aspect of her identity, as well as the social, political, and historical forces that operate upon Aboriginal people.

> Well, I know when I was younger it was always just kind of there. And I acknowledged it, but I never really spoke about it or dealt with it, or whatever you want to, I don't know the right word. But um, it was always there and I always knew it, but it was never really like a forefront focus, it was just, I kind of went on with my life. But as I've matured, and have become a woman, um, I'm more aware of all the influences out there and, um, the views on the Native people, and how I define my self as being Native, and what being Native means to me. Of course when you're younger you don't think of all those things but as you get older you kind of learn and acknowledge and accept more of yourself than maybe you did when you were younger. Um, like to me when I was younger it was just there, it just was and…it just was [laugh]. I just had an image of myself running around like mad with my hair all flying everywhere, but, and I know I looked Native, but you didn't really think about it that much then. Whereas now I do, I'm proud of it and I tell everybody. You know before you don't think about being proud of being Native because you don't really think of it as a child – it just kind of is.

While growing up Karen enjoyed, from her earliest memory, a relationship with Aboriginal culture, and through this, became accepting and very proud of this aspect of her identity. She acknowledges, however, that culturally she was raised White, and is therefore most inclined to embrace White, Western, cultural beliefs and practices.

> I have to say, well, I was brought up with White parents, and like I said before, they've acknowledged the Native ancestry and that kind of stuff quite well. But of course, it's a lot different when you are brought up in a Native home – like an entirely Native home. And so for me being brought up in a White home, I was less, hmm, how do you say this right… I was more

> inclined to go with the White ways than the Native ways. Whereas I am sure that if I was brought up with the Native ways, I might have been, um, more involved in, like the spiritualism of the Native side. Which would have been very interesting, it would have been really neat to be involved with. Um, but being brought up in the White, like you go White – the White way. But in the Native way, like just working where I work you can see how some of the kids are brought up with the Native ways, and I really admire the spirituality that they do have, those certain kids that do have it. And I kind of wish in a way that it would have been really neat to have had that experience growing up. But there is a line down the middle between being brought up in a White home or being brought up in a Native home. I think there is a definite line. And for me, I had like good experiences, but for some other young people, maybe they would have resented the fact that they were being brought up in a White home. But ya, I think there is a line – a definite line. It would be easy now as an adult to be able to swing more towards the Aboriginal side rather than stay strictly with the White side.

Although Karen's parents did their best to familiarize her with her Aboriginal ancestry, there were some needs, namely spiritual needs, that they were incapable of fulfilling. Now, as she observes the spirituality of some of the young people she works with, Karen concedes that this was a missed opportunity for her growing up in a White family. She believes, however, that as an adult it would be possible to move more toward an Aboriginal worldview and reclaim some of the ancestral traditions that have been lost.

As an adult, Karen states that she has faced little racism. On occasion, she has been called "savage" while playing competitive soccer, but otherwise, there have been few instances of overt racism. For Karen, it is not racism, but an everyday event that startles her back to the realization that although she is many ways culturally different from other Aboriginal people, she retains a shared racial heritage.

> I was at the mall the other day and um, a whole bunch of Native people came in. And some were at the door, some were sitting down, and some were, in the stores, and there was about fifteen of the Native people. And it was just, we come walking in, and the first thing I did, too, was I went – this is terrible – but I said "Oh, you know, they must have brought the truck in," kind of thing.

> But there was fifteen of them, and they were well dressed, they were, they were nice, they weren't like, you know, some stereotype views of the Native people, they were just there shopping. But it was just different to see so many of them in one spot. And then I'm like, like, look at them all. And I'm like, them, is me. And I caught myself when I did that when I went "Oh, look at them all." I went, oh them, I'm a them.

Experiences such as these elicit a sense of strangeness for Karen. Passing through the mall, she looks at other Aboriginal people through the eyes of one who temporarily forgets that she is of the same racial heritage. And at first she find herself thinking of them through the same stereotypical lens as do other nonAboriginals, but then catches herself: they were ordinary people "just there shopping."

In like fashion, Karen finds it "bizarre" to be a member of a Native Band. She did not grow up with this standing, and now to be granted this status as an adult, feels alien.

> It's kind of bizarre. I didn't grow up on it, so it's not a real natural thing for me. And, like when I'm with the Native kids and they're like, "Oh, which Band are you with?" it's totally normal. But if I were to say it to a different group of people, like a bunch of White people. We'll be talking about whatever, and I'll say, "Oh, I belong to the such and such Band," and they'll be like "Oh, what kind of music do you play?" [laugh]. Okay, no [laugh]. So um, it's kind of funny, you know, but… Like I know, there is a belonging there with that Band, but the growing up in a White environment, it's still a little bit weird for me.

As an adult, reflecting back on her experience of being raised in a White adoptive family, Karen feels strongly that being adopted, in itself, does not preclude a happy and fulfilling life. Although she concedes that there may be some troublesome issues inherent to the adoption situation, Karen considers these minor discomforts, not to detract from an extremely satisfying childhood, the key to which was her parents' approach to her Aboriginal heritage.

> You can be adopted from wherever – it doesn't matter where – and you can still grow up to be a normal contributing human being in the world, and um, you don't have to look at things like in a negative way, and say my birth family didn't want me, for whatever reason they didn't want me. Because that's totally, you just know that those people are going to grow up with like, drug and alcohol problems, you just know it. But you can still become a totally healthy, well-balanced human being even though you are adopted. And although there maybe a few different struggles, or issues that you need to deal with coming from a different background from what you're raised in, I think if you're raised to acknowledge and accept it and the family is open to discussing, you know, this other background that you have, then I think it is all a positive thing.

At this time in her life, Karen remains happily immersed in her various sporting and occupational pursuits. Her dream, however, is to one day combine these two endeavors and open a facility for troubled and disadvantaged youth.

> I have always had a interest in working with teenagers. So one day I will combine my sporting background with my social work background, and make a big club where kids can have access to doing sports and participating in all different kinds of sports. That's what I want to do.

Autumn's Story

Stories of Childhood

"Memories of fear and hiding."

Twenty-eight years old and widowed with eight children. This was the dreadful predicament facing Autumn's mother, Beverly, just six weeks after Autumn's birth. Her father, Raymond, was a labourer whose travels took him wherever work could be found. At the time of his death, the family lived in a small town near the Saskatchewan-Alberta border. Here Beverly struggled for a year and a half to provide for the family before deciding a move to the city might lighten her burden. In the darkness of night she packed up the family and caught a train to Saskatoon where her sister lived and could provide temporary boarding. Following the stay at her sister's, Beverly moved the family to a tiny house located in Saskatoon's inner city. It was here that family life seriously began to deteriorate.

> So we lived with them for a while until my mom got her own house. And, I don't know, um…What my oldest brother says is that she wasn't aware that she could get welfare. And ah, so she, so she started bootlegging. And that was enough for her to have an income at least. I don't know that she worked at that the whole time. So she'd, ah, my brother describes it as living with the scum of the earth, spending time with the scum of the earth. How I interpret that, she was spending some time with the street people. There are a lot of street people in Saskatoon, on the west side of Saskatoon which is kind of like, you know, the wrong side of the tracks. And we lived in the little teeny, little teeny dinky house. And um, so we were forced to tolerate that kind of lifestyle. And, you know, when I said that I don't have memories of that time, a lot of them aren't actual visual memories, but they're sensory memories. So I have memories of fear and hiding. And I have memories of the smell of alcohol and cigarettes. And ah, memories of nighttime party noises and things like that.

Unaware of the availability of social support, Beverly turned to an illicit means of economic survival, and began associating with a like-minded circle of

acquaintances. Frequent drinking parties meant that home was no longer a place of safety and security for Autumn and her siblings. As Beverly's drinking and partying began to escalate, her absence from the home increased, leading Autumn's older siblings to assume parental duties.

> What happened, though, was that the last couple of times she would leave and go partying. And so then all of a sudden the others were kind of forced to try to parent us. And I mean they were, like my brother was twelve and my sister would have been nine-ten. And um, it was very difficult for them because, I remember my brother saying that they would go around and raid gardens to bring food home for the rest of the kids. And of course my sister and I were still toddlers and ah couldn't handle eating a carrot because it wouldn't swallow. So my sister used to try to feed us whatever. And she said she'd put bread in water and mash it up and throw in a little bit of sugar and that would be what we'd eat.

As the family situation worsened, child welfare increasingly became involved. It was not long after their arrival in Saskatoon that Autumn and her siblings were apprehended and sent to a receiving home for children. This occurred on three occasions, whereupon the third occasion the children were all placed in foster care. Some remained in foster care, some returned to Beverly's care, and some, like Autumn, were eventually adopted into nonAboriginal homes. Before arriving at her adoptive home, Autumn recalls that she and an older sister were subjected to horrendous abuse while living in their interim foster home.

> I was there about eight months, and she was there for another year after. And it was horrible there, they were extremely abusive and I just remember living in fear and being sexually abused. And um… you know, getting a licking, and being yelled at. There was a tremendous amount of fear in that home. And from what my sister, my sister has more memories of it and she said that we were treated like animals. That they didn't take care of our physical or health needs. And we were very sick with bronchitis and they wouldn't do anything about it. And we weren't allowed to eat at the same table with them. When she tried to report the sexual abuse that we were being subjected to by, by the son, um she got slapped around.

Autumn believes that her sister still suffers from the effects of the abuse experienced in this home, and is thankful that her stay was much shorter. Her memory of the day she left is especially vivid, for it was the first time her foster parents ever treated her with kindness and generosity.

> I do have a good memory there. I remember, um, one day the foster mother brought me into the kitchen – and I was so freaked out because I was never in the kitchen. And she sat me at the table and she gave me milk and cookies, and I was so freaked out because she never gave me milk and cookies and I kind of was, I think I was a little bit hysterical. I was trying to swallow them and drink a little too fast and the milk came out my nose [laughter]. She was being really nice, eh.
>
> Then I remember being in the social worker's car…surrounded by gifts – a bunch of birthday presents. I don't have any recollection of them being given to me or opening them, but I think that the foster family had given them to me. Um, and it must have been just to look good. Because I, I just remember sitting in the car thinking, wow, all these are mine.

Autumn received the unexpected display of kindness with puzzlement and nervous excitement. As a child, it was difficult to comprehend such an unusual turn of events within the context of the mistreatment she and her sister had thus far endured. As an adult, she believes that the foster parents' actions were intended to make a favourable impression upon the social worker.

At age four, Autumn, along with a car full of presents was taken to her new adoptive family. She had been to the house once before, a display visit that evidently went well. Now she was back and things seemed very good. Autumn remembers the home looking spotless and new, and her soon-to-be adoptive mother, pleasant and welcoming. She was treated to milk and cookies alongside another young girl, Cindy. Autumn knew this is where she would stay.

> I had been there once before…and I guess at some point before the social worker had taken me over there for a visit. And I remember there, in their

> house, I mean it was a new, it was so new. I can remember shiny and all the chrome and everything was so modern and so bright and clean and spotless. And I remember Hazel giving us, Cindy and me, milk and cookies and I, I actually, I enjoyed that. It felt like I was special. She was very nice. And so, I knew that's where I was going, I was going to live with that.

On her fifth birthday, Autumn was adopted by Hazel and Albert, a White, middle-class, professional couple who already had three children of their own: two boys (Justin and Warren) six and eight years older than Autumn, and Cindy, who was the same age. Having been told after Cindy's birth that she could have no more children, Hazel sought to add to the family through adoption. Both Albert and Hazel belonged to the United Church, which at the time was urging members to adopt Aboriginal and Metis children. Hazel liked the idea, Albert was leery – unconvinced that placing Aboriginal children in White adoptive families was appropriate to the needs of the children involved. As was often the case, Hazel's wish prevailed.

In the beginning, life for Autumn in her new adoptive home was relatively uneventful. Other than stashing food and eating until she was forced to stop, she recalls nothing remarkable about her first six to eight months. Then one day, with what was merely a routine request, Autumn remembers detecting an ominous and prophetic tone to Hazel's voice.

> It's almost like where I became conscious, was one day…um, Hazel, her tone of voice was different. She told me to go down stairs and get potatoes for supper. It's the way she said it, and I remember thinking nothing's ever going to be the same - and it wasn't. But I remember that exact moment and it was like then the honeymoon was over…

Autumn recalls sensing that a terrible change was about to take place in her new home, and it did. Her bright shiny new world began to tarnish, as the abuse of her former foster home now reappeared at the hands of Hazel.

> I mean I got hollered and yelled at every day. You know when we were alone she would holler at me and hit me and dig her finger nails into me and say things like I was bad and I was evil…and just, you know, blame me for her rage that had nothing to do with me. I know that now, but at the time, I didn't understand. Um…and also, you know, to hear a lot of opportunities to kind of point out, to really emphasize everything that I did wrong.

Faced with relentless and randomly delivered abuse, Autumn was again relegated to a life of fear, hiding, and constant vigilance. Survival for Autumn meant developing new abilities to decrease the likelihood of assault.

> Hazel was really abusive, a very abusive person, and um, very controlling. So that day I became, my life basically became ah, developing a new skill trying to anticipate her moods and avoid her when she was upset with me and not disappoint her.

Other family members were, for the most part, oblivious to the abuse Autumn suffered. Her brothers, who were significantly older, were too immersed in the pastimes of adolescence to know of her mistreatment. Likewise, she remembers her father as too immersed in his work as a university professor to realize that Hazel was physically and emotionally abusing their daughter when others were not around. When, as an adult, Autumn did reveal the abuse to her father he struggled immensely to accept that his (now former) wife could have inflicted such harm. Albert, Autumn states, was raised to treat children with love, care, and respect; never, in his upbringing, would one purposely hurt their child. Autumn recalls that Albert, though often lost in concentration with his "deep professor thoughts", was a kind and playful father. He put her to bed, gave "horsy rides", and played a rather peculiar word enunciation game.

> He often would, um, put us to bed. So he would give us little horsy rides and stuff. He made that fun, although his idea of fun was a little bit odd, too. He would play this game where Cindy and I we would have to enunciate, or repeat big words after him. This was his idea of fun [laughter].

The one family member who was aware, to some extent, of Autumn's mistreatment was Cindy, her same-age sister. Autumn remembers Cindy as a sickly child who received considerable care and nurturing from Hazel, who was a trained nurse. Autumn believes that Cindy was quite jealous of her, and thus kept silent about the abuse such that she might gain their mother's favour at Autumn's expense. Despite this, Autumn recalls that the sisterly relationship was at first quite amiable, that is, until plotting by Hazel turned the two sisters against each other.

> But we were very close in age and so we, we got along fairly well. Although fairly shortly, I mean it was quite soon after, I think it was around the time when I started hearing a change in tone in Hazel's voice. Um she started to pit the two of us against each other. So um, Cindy told me one time, this was when we were about age nine, she said "You know, mom told me a long time ago that anytime you do anything wrong, I'm supposed to tell her, she said I'm supposed to watch you." And I said "Well, don't tell her." She said, "But I'm supposed to." And I said, "Well don't do it." And so then I started to be kind of mean to her. So I terrorized her when nobody else was there [laughter].

Although all was not well in her new adoptive family, Autumn believes that to the outside observer, her transracial adoption must have seemed an unqualified success. The family lived in an affluent neighbourhood, traveled, skied, and camped. Autumn attended summer camp, and was enrolled in a multitude of lessons and activities that Hazel decided she should attend whether she was interested in them or not. Autumn suspects that to some extent she was put on display – a public persona meant to impress; yet for her, it meant nothing but hypocrisy.

> In public, we were the perfect family. And in public she would be very nice to me and I was scared shitless. So she was a real hypocrite.

Autumn remembers a few occasions where Hazel seemed to realize the degree to which she terrified her daughter, and in recognizing this, would gesture a

conciliatory response. But such moments of reprieve were not cause for comfort or reassurance. Autumn could not trust that her mother's intentions were sincere and thus received them with trepidation.

> And there were a couple times in my growing up life, well in the years that I was with her, that…where, I'm not sure, I think she recognized her own evilness, and genuinely felt remorse and she'd come to me. One time she was looking for me and I just…I went into a panic and I hid behind the door. And she was calling me for something that wasn't, it wasn't to give me shit for anything. She was just trying to, you know, figure out where I was and she saw me hiding behind the door. And she just stopped cold and she realized that, now when I look back, she realized what she had instilled me, the kind of fear she instilled in me. And she just stopped, and she came up and hugged me. And I, I went stiff, because I didn't trust what, I didn't trust her hugging me. And for her to say sorry was…I mean, you know that's unpredictable stuff. So, for me it equaled danger.

Hazel's sporadic attempts to redress her abusive ways were confusing to Autumn. She could not trust that today's hug would not become tomorrow's slap, and thus remained guarded and distant to her Hazel's displays of affection and reparation. Autumn also found it highly disconcerting and hypocritical that Hazel would often turn to her for comfort in times of distress.

> Well, it was absolutely twisted, because I knew that she, I mean she made no bones about the fact that she didn't like me, that I didn't meet her expectations, that she wouldn't treat me anything other than, you know, sneaky and bad, evil, or…you know, everything repugnant. And then to turn around and act as my confidant and actually do this, you know, it would just really mess me up.

Although she found Hazel's appeals for solace reprehensible, Autumn was not openly rejecting, for a certain measure of safety could be found during any moment that Hazel was not actively engaged in harmful behaviour.

> Well, I think that anytime she wasn't directing her rage at me…was a good thing, so I didn't say anything, even though inside I was thinking, go away, I don't want you near me!

Stories of School

" I went to school as a little White kid, and every day was a fucking nightmare."

As a child, Autumn's home life did not engender experiences of safety and security. In her words, it was a time of oppression. But this was not only the case at home. School, Autumn recalls, was equally, if not more oppressive. Being the only Aboriginal child in school, yet socialized White, she was singled out for extremely harsh treatment from her peers.

> Some of things that I faced, um… I got physically attacked, right from the first day of nursery school. Um, I would get pushed around and kicked, and basically physically assaulted on occasion. And sometimes it would be right in the classroom when the teacher's back was turned. Um, you know, for the most part anytime we had to be in groups or in pairs I would be left and the teacher would have to choose someone to pair up with me.
>
> So my childhood was really marked by a lot of oppression. Not only at home, but at school, too. It was very very difficult, because I was, because, I mean they're middle class, and professionals, and, ah…So I went to school as a little White kid. And ah, every day was fucking nightmare, it was terrible. I think because I learned young to block out feelings, I would block out reactions to, you know, racism and bullying by other kids. So they would give up eventually.

Although the violence and rejection took an emotional toll, Autumn refused to allow her peers the satisfaction of knowing it. When under attack Autumn recalls she would smile and laugh at her tormentors, pretending not to care while holding back her emotional reactions.

Autumn says that her teachers, on the other hand, were not overly harsh in their treatment of her, though she does remember considerable inconsistency in their beliefs regarding her intellectual and scholastic aptitude. In any given year her intellect could variously be deemed superior (at one point she skipped a grade) or

deficient (one year she was in danger in failing). Herein, Autumn implicates skin colour as the determining factor.

> From one grade to the next, I knew if the teacher thought I was stupid or not. Some teachers thought I was smart and some teachers thought I was stupid, and it had nothing to do with me. I believe that it had to do with the colour of my skin. And um, so that was pretty bizarre. It was much more fun when I was smart because then I would get preferential treatment.

It was difficult for Autumn not knowing from one year to the next whether she would be considered academically challenged, normal, or advanced. She recalls in grade four developing the notion that she was indeed very challenged.

> In grade four we moved to Toronto, and I remember from day one the teacher just seemed to, the way she talked to me was as if I wasn't speaking clearly, you know, I wasn't making any sense. And I just about failed that year. And I remember in that year developing the notion that I just wasn't good at certain things, I wasn't good at writing, I wasn't good at, actually I wasn't good at anything [laughter].

Autumn says that these feelings of inadequacy stayed with her until she began her social work degree in 1995.

Through Autumn's first seven years of school, some grades were more tolerable than others. For example, in grade six she recalls having an excellent teacher who fostered maturity in all of his students. Autumn also had a best friend in grade six, though despite this, still felt the pains of rejection and exclusion through experiences such as never being invited to a birthday party.

Stories of Adolescence

"Drugs and alcohol and...nihilism."

In high school, Autumn's situation became worse. For Autumn, these years were a time of intense feelings of loneliness, isolation, and rejection. She remembers grade seven as the year her struggles became particularly severe.

> Then grade seven is where it really got bad. I went to, um, a junior high school in Toronto, and ah, I mean there was drugs and sex and all kinds of stuff. And a lot of the kids that I went to school with, um, went to other schools so I didn't have a peer group so I was very lonely and I got threatened a lot – it was pretty scary.

Grade eight was somewhat better. The family moved to Kingston, Ontario where Autumn found the children more welcoming and the teachers more receptive to her ability. Unfortunately, this did not alleviate Autumn's overwhelming feelings of loneliness and isolation, which from grades nine through eleven continued to intensify.

> Then I went into grade nine, and um…that's when I started getting quite lonely…Because I didn't have a peer group. I couldn't seem to find one. It was very lonely and I spent all my time in… I was in competitive swimming at the time so that kind of compensated. I had a peer group there, but most of them weren't in my school. And that continued into grade ten and in grade eleven it got even lonelier. So I spent a lot of time reading and a lot of time watching TV.

In the absence of a relevant peer group, solitary activities became Autumn's emotional sanctuary. Reading, Autumn says, was her means of escape from "the pressures of reality." The scope of her reading was extensive. Her father kept a considerable store of books in the house, which allowed Autumn to sample diverse subject matter such as electronics, religion, science fiction, and psychology. Her other diversion at the time, and one that she credits as providing great comfort, was cigarettes.

> But you know what really compensated, in grade eleven, was smoking, and the fact that I had started doing solitary activities. Smoking for some reason really helped me to stuff things [laughter]. I would leave school and I would light up a cigarette and I would feel better.

As a teenager, reading, watching television, listening to music, and smoking cigarettes helped Autumn cope with her intense feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Despite such attempts to ease her suffering, at sixteen Autumn made her first of several suicide attempts. She does not recall a specific event that triggered a desire to end her life, other than a pervasive feeling of disconnection from herself and the world around her.

> When I look back, I, I can't remember, you know, at the time what happened that I wanted to commit suicide. But I know it was just, it was just…It was really like…having no sense of self as a human being…not just as an Aboriginal, but as a person who is a human being. But, that I was so invisible that it really wouldn't matter if I was here; and the pain of that, the emotional pain of that.

To Autumn, the feeling that she did not exist in the eyes of others led her to act against herself and thus jeopardize her own existence. Autumn was not alone, but lonely. There were people in her life, who showed care and concern, people with whom she could spend time. She lived with her father, and having realized that her attraction was to women, made friends in the gay and lesbian community. Still, she lacked connection. What did these people know of her experience? What did she know of her experience, for there was no one in her life with whom she could identify as an Aboriginal person.

> It's a sense of being invisible because…for what I already explained about, that there were no mirrors in my world to validate who I was. And that continued until I was desperate. And when I say no mirror, that is what it was. Not only in terms of the fact that there was no one who was Aboriginal in my life, but also because of the other people that I was with. I had a really eclectic group of friends, even so, they didn't have any conception of what my experience was like. And, you know, combined with the fact that I was kind of numb and unable to really connect to people. They didn't really know who I was, so… people just didn't know me.

Autumn felt like a stranger to those around her and a stranger to herself. Metaphorically speaking, she was invisible; others did not see her – that is, validate her being, and thus she could not see herself. For the most part, Autumn did not want

to be invisible, because invisibility engendered tremendous feelings of sadness through relational disconnection and isolation. However, in some contexts not being noticed had definite advantages.

> A lot of the time I didn't want to be visible, because visibility would often be dangerous, in terms of being called names and being threatened, or being pushed. Or when I was young, being approached sexually in inappropriate ways

Feelings of invisibility through disconnection and alienation were exacerbated because Autumn had essentially no access to Aboriginal role models. The one occasion when Autumn did attend school with another Aboriginal peer, her own biases kept her from attempting a relationship.

> There was one other girl in my high school when I was in grade eleven – because I switched high schools from grade ten to eleven. I went to an inner city school because I thought there would be more, you know, diversity. And ah, there was one other Aboriginal in there, but we didn't talk to each other. I mean I didn't know how to approach her, because I grew up with the same stereotypes as the rest of them. I mean I knew that, you know, people would call me names if they were talking to me about me, but it didn't fit for me because I didn't have any mirrors to validate who I was growing up, so, you know, you talk about alienation I was alienated from myself as well. So much so that when I saw another Aboriginal person I called them an Aboriginal but not myself. And I know that that's kind of hard to understand, but that's the only way that I can explain it.

Having been socialized White, Autumn came to unquestioningly embrace White cultural values to an extent that she did not perceive herself as Aboriginal and held the same pejorative views of Aboriginal people as did society in general. An absence of positive Aboriginal role models made it all the more difficult – and unlikely – that Autumn would embrace an Aboriginal identity. Instead, her image of what it meant to be Aboriginal was based on negative stereotypes, and thus to preserve a positive sense of self, she was compelled to reject her Aboriginal heritage.

> The psychological safety measure is alienation from the self because the self is represented by all kinds of negative things. Who wants to grow up saying well, I'm Aboriginal so therefore, you know, I'm drunk and I'm dirty, and I'm stupid, and I'm lazy and I'm – you know, all the negative stereotypes. Who wants that! No one does.

Superficial attempts made by Autumn's parents to educate and expose her to a more affirming representation of Aboriginal people were ineffective. Books depicting Aboriginal peoples were made available to her, though she looked at them with the same contempt as would anyone with racist beliefs.

> Yes, my culture was in a book [laugh]. I occasionally perused my culture in a book – looked at photographs of all the Indians in Canada.
>
> They just had them around the house, and they just had them around the house because they were there for me. Although that's so ludicrous, I mean, you don't learn about your culture from a book. And it doesn't make any sense at all because, you know, looking at a book, I mean I remember looking at the books with the same attitude that, you know, I learned about in school, where it was a quaint historic information about a dying race, that, I don't know about noble savages, but drunk and dirty street people and thieves and… So, I mean it just…there was no point to it.

On one occasion Autumn's parents brought her to a powwow, the results of which were no better than the attempts to expose her to Aboriginal culture through the coffee table literature.

> I remember once, when I was fourteen, we drove from Ontario to BC and stopped at the Siksika Nation because there was a powwow. And I was terrified! I was out of the car for maybe ten minutes then I went and sat in the car.
>
> What did everybody else do?
>
> Well they kind of wandered around for awhile and then we left. But I thought the Indians were, you know, evil and savages and violent and drunks and that they were going to kill me [laughter].

Absurd, and very horrid, caricatures of Aboriginal people combined with a fear of the unknown turned Autumn away from her cultural heritage and towards a path of despair.

About age sixteen Autumn's parents separated, and later divorced. With Cindy choosing to live with Hazel, and her older brothers already moved out, Autumn now lived alone with her father. Although she was glad to see Hazel go, this was still a time of intense alienation and disconnection. No longer feeling that she could tolerate the loneliness and rejection at school, Autumn quit, and spent her time doing drugs and alcohol with older friends. For four years substance use became a prominent fixture in her life.

> Well pretty heavy recreation. It was like, it was a driving force – that's just what we did. I mean we had… we'd smoke dope everyday. We had acid …we had amphetamines and stuff we'd pick up. No needles, [laugh] which I'm really thankful for [laugh]. I started drinking quite a bit, too. Although for me, my drug of choice was amphetamines. So the next few years kind of went by in a little bit of a haze.

At age eighteen, Autumn joined the Army Reserves for a summer job and was quite successful, to a point where she contemplated joining the regular forces to pursue a career in electronics. She changed her mind, however, upon talking to a psychic who suggested her talents would be wasted in this line of work. Following a stint with the reserves, Autumn contented herself to live a carefree and reckless lifestyle, working construction and living paycheque to paycheque.

> I did, um, construction work, and still did a lot of drugs and drinking and partying. It was a little bit aimless. I think my life was motivated by having enough money to pay my rent and bills and then having enough money to party, and…have sex [laughter].

Stories of Young Adulthood

"The beginning of my awakening."

By age twenty Autumn began to tire of her listless lifestyle. She was ready for something different, and thus when presented with the opportunity to embark toward a more meaningful existence, she moved quickly.

> I was in Toronto one weekend visiting Hazel, and I saw this sign in the subway for, um, transitional youth programming at the University of Toronto. And basically it was a program that you would take as a bridging program if you've never finished high school. You take this program, it upgrades your skills and then you can go to university. So I called them up and I applied, and, um, I moved to Toronto.

Thus began Autumn's university career, a journey that persists today as Autumn works to complete her Doctorate in social work. Autumn's entrance into post-secondary education was followed, in relatively short order, by two equally significant life events: reconnecting with her culture and reuniting with her birth family.

Stories of Reclaiming Culture

"It was just such a gift."

During summer semester breaks, Autumn worked for Immigration Canada, which in itself did not – ironically – diminish her experiences of racism. She was disheartened to find that many of the people she worked with were equal in racist sentiment to those of her previous experiences. She did, however, make a very influential friend while working at immigration. This new friend was instrumental in directing Autumn to some timely and helpful therapy, as well as to a new job, this time, within the Aboriginal community.

> When I was twenty-three, um, I had worked at Immigration in the summers between university, and I made a friend there who was a really interesting woman. And we would sit and chat, and I started telling her about these dreams I was having, because I started having these dreams where I was like in this big black whole and I couldn't get out. I could see the top but I couldn't get out because the sides were muddy and slippery. And she calls me on day and she says, "You know, I think you need to see a therapist." [laughter]. She said, "Here," and she gave me the card of a friend of hers who was a therapist. And so I went and I saw her for two and a half years, and that was the start of my therapy. And it was quite timely because, I mean there was so much racism in immigration, it was just disgusting, really disgusting. It was always directed toward the new group. Um, so I did that, and then another day we were talking and she handed me this little article – a little advertisement that she cut out. And I looked and it was an advertisement for a, I was doing secretarial work, it was an advertisement for a secretary for um, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation which is the Treaty Nine area in northern Ontario, the administrative office was in Toronto. And so I applied and got the job. So that was just, I just turned twenty-four, and I started working there in the end of October. And ah, ya, that was, it was like, all or nothing [laughter].

"All or nothing" refers to the manner in which Autumn entered the Aboriginal community, a community that had been to that point foreign and fearsome to her. Initially Autumn did not see her new work as anything more than another job that happened to pay well. She recalls at first being apprehensive in her new surroundings, for she had never been around other Aboriginal people before, and wondered how she would be received.

> It was a little bit fearful, but the money was good. So I mean I just looked at it as a job. And I was going to go to this job where the money was good. And ah, but it was just one of the best experiences in my life. I mean I went in there and it was just so funny because people were so relaxed and casual, and, and, you know, they'd laugh all the time and tease me, and I just, I just didn't quite know what to do with that. And after awhile I just started relaxing and I realized that I was accepted – it had nothing to do with my skin colour. That whole dynamic that I had lived with, you know, going in and being cautious in an environment because it would take time for them to get to know me, wasn't a factor there. It was who I was as a person.
>
> When I went to the treaty office and worked with other Aboriginal people, racism wasn't the issue. Um, it was just such a gift. That was the opportunity for me to see what life was like without racism and to be able to experience it

> everyday. It was very timely, too. I might have offed myself if I hadn't had that. Like I really needed for that to happen at the time it did.

All her life Autumn had lived within the confines of racism. Even as a child before she could understand its social relevancy, Autumn's existence was marred by the presence of racism. In adolescence she became more aware of racism, though was unable to release herself from its grip. Work at the treaty office changed this, and thus as the burden of racism lifted, so did Autumn's despair. At her new job Autumn worked along side and fostered relationships with a diverse group of Aboriginal people. Some had grown up on reserves, some were elected leaders, and some were spiritual leaders. Most importantly, she felt unconditional acceptance regardless of skin colour or upbringing.

It was also at the treaty office that Autumn met her first spiritual teachers. Two medicine men, in particular, were instrumental in introducing Autumn to cultural and spiritual teachings, initiating a journey that has at times slowed, but never ceased. Autumn states that learning about Aboriginal culture and spirituality was instrumental in helping her to accept – and embrace – her Aboriginal identity.

> How have you come to accept yourself as an Aboriginal woman?
>
> My culture. Learning about it and, not only learning about it, but relearning it. Because it's something that I've always carried but I just didn't know until I learned about it and had words to put to my experiences. And I had teachings to help me understand things that happened, and to go through my life and reinterpret the things that had happened to me.

Autumn believes that her culture has always resided within her, but that growing up it was strongly suppressed. As a child, she recalls things happening to her that she and those around her could only understand through a Western cultural lens.

Reconnecting with her culture as an adult allowed Autumn to attach new cultural meanings to these once inexplicable experiences.

> Growing up I would have…I would have experiences here and there that I didn't, in the culture that I grew up in, I didn't have any teaching about those things to understand them. Um, there would be things like hearing voices that I couldn't see. Or having dreams about things that would happen. And when I would tell my dad about these things, even though he's, I consider him a spiritual man, he just got worried about me. He thought that I was developing schizophrenia [laughter] as an adolescent. The way I understand those experiences now, are those are the gifts that I was given at birth. Those were the gifts I was born with. I was born with the knowledge of, I was born with an intuition of, um, I have the gift of being able to know the future. I have the gift of being able to know energy and work with it. And um…um, other things like I can hear the voice of gods talking. I can hear when the ancestors are talking to me, only I don't hear the voices because I've blocked that out. I hear it at an intuitive level. So I do what I can to explain that. So, growing up in the White culture there just was no mirrors. And ah, it was a tremendous relief, to start going to ceremonies and learning from elders. To learn about traditional spirituality and the incredible power of it. Um…and the way I see it is my life was one dimensional.

When she was young, Autumn did not have cultural guides to help her understand and appreciate her ancestral gifts. Without this, her cultural endowment was rendered nonsensical. Learning from elders liberated Autumn from the White-Western cultural trappings that prevented her from realizing the value and importance of her cultural gifts. Spirituality, Autumn says, has been an especially meaningful addition to her life, as it has unveiled new dimensions to her once singularly defined existence. Even more so, Autumn explains that spirituality is essential to her entire being, such that it informs who she is and how she conducts her life on a daily basis.

Stories of Finding Family

"The doorway to finding myself."

Soon after reconnecting with her culture, Autumn initiated a reconnection of another sort, this time, with her birth family. Again, it was her work at the treaty

office that facilitated this opportunity. In conversation with a colleague, Autumn learned of the existence of an extended family member. With encouragement from her colleague, she wrote a letter to this individual, who was then able to put her in touch with members of her immediate birth family.

> She said, "Well why don't you find your family?" And I said, "I wouldn't know where to begin looking." And she said, "Well what's your birth name?" And I said, "Smithers." And she said, "Well, that's Dan, that's probably a relative of yours...." And, so I did, I wrote him a letter. Um, in October of '86. Then on November 11,1986 it came back to me.

Dan, it turned out, was a first cousin to Autumn's birth father. However, before Dan's return letter to Autumn even arrived, she received an unexpected telephone call from her sister, Coreen. Fate had it that Coreen was married to Tim, Dan's nephew. While golfing together, Dan mentioned to Tim that he had received a letter from a woman whom he thought might be related to Coreen. Dan passed the letter to Tim, who passed it to Coreen, who immediately identified Autumn as her missing sister.

> It's serendipity, because eleven days later I'm in my apartment and I had just purchased a waterbed. So I was in my apartment and I was setting up this waterbed, and the phone rings and I answer it and this woman is on the phone, and she says – she said my name, I don't use that name now, she says "Autumn?" And I said "Ya." And she said, "Are you sitting down?" and I said, "No." [laughter]. She said, "I think you should." I said, "Why?" And I sat down. And she said, "I'm your sister." I went "Oh my god!" [laughter] "Oh my god!" I said, "Is my mother alive?" And she said, "Yes." And I went, "Oh my god!" I just said that a whole bunch of times. It was a real good thing that she told me to sit down, because I would have fallen and bashed my head on that waterbed! [laughter]

Coreen was also adopted into a White family and had also recently reconnected with the birth family. Ironically, Coreen and Autumn's parents knew

each other when their children were young, and later it was determined that the two had likely played together, not knowing they were siblings.

Within days after Coreen's telephone call Autumn had spoken to her mother and various siblings, and by the following spring, she made the trip to Saskatchewan to visit in person. Preparation for this trip included talking to Coreen about the dreadful experience she had when meeting the family for the first time.

> By this time I kind of had a feel for what the scoop was in the family, you know. And Coreen was invaluable, because she had met the family just four months before I had sent that letter. And her experience had been quite a nightmare. Like, um, they were drinking and most of them were drunk when she met them, and were very belligerent. They said, "This is who we are and if you don't like it then you can fuck yourself." That kind of drunken, idiotic behaviour.

Bad as it was, the story of Coreen's experience did not deter Autumn from her own bid for reunification. In June of 1986, at age twenty-four, Autumn flew from Toronto to Saskatoon where a gathering of family members awaited her arrival. Autumn recalls her reception at the airport as a very touching and beautiful moment, though imbedded within her recollection is a sense of paradoxical astonishment that her family was actually "Indian."

> I got to Saskatoon and it was really quite a, a beautiful moment. It was very strange because I remember coming down the escalator at the airport in Saskatoon, and looking and seeing all these brown faces looking up at me, and going wow, are they ever Indian! [laughter].

The first thing Autumn noticed when descending the airport escalator was the skin colour of those who awaited her. Although she shared her family's brown skin, she did not share the perception that she, too, was "Indian".

From the airport, Autumn proceeded to her sister Denise's home where she was to have dinner and socialize with family members. Despite Coreen's

forewarning, Autumn was shocked and overwhelmed by the cultural collision that ensued. The urban-poor existence of her birth sister was far removed from Autumn's own White middle-class upbringing.

> Even though I had prepared myself, it was, it was a real culture shock, a real culture shock. Because my sister lives in a very, somewhere on the west side of Saskatoon – deep deep deep in the west side of Saskatoon, I mean, ah, in the ghetto. And she must have lived in the smallest, ugliest, dinkiest, scrawniest, slum house on the west side. And ah, there was just a bunch of traffic around because she didn't have a lawn it was just dirt. And the kids came out and the baby was in her diaper and she was covered in dirt. The door was wide open. And I walked in and there's one or two of my sisters sitting there and a friend drinking, was drunk, and was laughing and carrying on. And my brother was passed out in a car outside. And ah, we visited a little bit, and then my sister started supper. And supper consisted of Kraft dinner and hotdogs [laughter]. I mean the inside of her house was fairly clean, but its Salvation Army furniture and she served Kraft Dinner at the table in a pot. So I had, you know, I was really spending a lot of my energy just trying to check my middle-class snobbery because I was ready to hightail it out of there, and just go to the Holiday Inn. And ah, at some point during the dinner I look up and there's this woman and her boyfriend standing there and it's my aunt. And they just kind of stood there and looked at me for a while and nodded their heads, and then they left [laughter]. And that was my first night in Saskatoon.

Autumn recalls the thoughts that swarmed through her head during the initial moments of her visit.

> I thought, oh my god! She lives in this? How could she live like this? This is just like…this is just like Indians! [laughter]. Oh my god those, those little Indian kids are all dirty and running around, just like Indian kids do. [laughter]. You know. And I remember thinking, how can she let her kids get so dirty? And I remember thinking that her kids looked like…they looked like little scruffy street kids. They looked like poor, scruffy street kids. And then walking in, like everything, everything looked so cheap...and old…and tacky. There was nothing appealing about the house, or the people.

During her visit, Autumn stayed in the small apartment of a sister who, unlike the majority of family members, practiced sobriety. Here she was able to look at photographs and share stories in a peaceful and sober atmosphere.

Autumn recalls that by this time in her life she was no longer abusing drugs and alcohol, yet she found herself drinking as way of relating to, and connecting with, family members. Indeed the first words uttered to Autumn as she walked into her sister's house were "Hey, you want a beer?" and for next three days, the flow of alcohol was incessant. To her surprise, the chaos and tumult of the first few days did not quash her determination to reposition herself within the birth family. Autumn believes that this demonstration of commitment and perseverance decreased her siblings' fears of rejection to a point where they could sober up and begin the process of communicating in a more meaningful fashion.

> I was surprised that first visit didn't scare me away. But what happened was that towards the end of the week, um, they all sobered up. So, I mean I think their carrying on was because of their fear. And once they saw that I was going to keep coming back to visit each day, they sobered up. It was either that or they couldn't drink for more than three days in a row [laughter]. So they did sober up and I had a chance to visit with them.

Exceedingly disparate life experience created a huge cultural chasm between Autumn and her birth family. Yet, in coming to know individual members, she was elated to also find similarities, for this afforded a sense of familial connection never before known.

> It was very interesting because I think genetically my older sister and I are quite a bit alike. So it was really bizarre because, um, I remember going to her apartment and we even had the same pictures on the walls. The same music – we listened to the same music. That was, that was really a profound experience for me, because I had never felt that kind of connection with any other person. So to suddenly realize that there are people genetically similar to me, in terms of tastes and outlook, and ya, it was amazing.

Following her visit, Autumn moved west from Toronto to Red Deer. Family members were upset that she chose Red Deer in favour of Saskatoon and interpreted this as evidence of rejection. Autumn, however, dismisses this notion and says that

the decision was based more on her inability to cope with the family dynamics and concomitant alcohol abuse and violence. In Red Deer, Autumn continued to develop a relationship with family members through telephone conversations. A few years later, she felt better prepared to deal with her family, so moved back to Saskatoon and began attending university.

The discovery of kindred relations afforded Autumn a sense of belonging never before known. Reconnection with her birth mother, Beverly, was especially meaningful, and although she has not seen Beverly for twenty-two years, a felt sense of connection endured.

> I couldn't believe that there were actually people that I was connected to by blood, because I had never had that – that I could remember. But at some strange level I remembered my mother and always felt kind of, always felt kind of connected to her.

It took a few years before Autumn actually lived in the same city as Beverly, for just as Autumn moved to Saskatoon, Beverly moved to Jasper seeking refuge from the stresses of her family. The family was one of Beverly's problems, alcohol was another. During her stay in Jasper, Beverly often called Autumn while intoxicated, until one day Autumn had had enough. She confronted Beverly about her behaviour, putting an end not only to the drunken telephone calls, but to all phone calls. Shortly afterward, Beverly moved back to Saskatoon where she was subsequently diagnosed with cancer. As she came closer to death, Beverly, who had always been a quiet shy woman, became more open in conversation. This allowed Autumn to say the things she needed to say to her mother before she passed away.

The enormity of Autumn's reunification with her birth family is emphasized though the powerful metaphors she uses to describe her experience.

> The big picture significance would be the completion of a cycle. A coming full circle and returning home, and the doorway to finding my self. Opening the door to finding myself and my roots. My family standing just inside the door, and I had to go far beyond where they were standing to find out who I am.

For Autumn, reconnecting with her birth family helped bring to fruition a circled path that for many years had been left ajar. However, because of her family's own lack of cultural participation and knowledge, she had to go beyond the immediacy of their support to further reclaim her cultural heritage and, hence, a renewed sense of identity as an Aboriginal woman.

Stories of Adulthood

"I'm not really the way you think I am."

As a child, Autumn was cautious not to fantasize about her birth family. To do so could only lead her to the sad conclusion that her family was no different than what she had learned of all other Aboriginal people, who according to prevailing discourse were lazy, unintelligent, dirty, and so forth. Thus, when she was young, Autumn disowned her Aboriginal heritage, for to do otherwise would be to align herself with the negative stereotypes. To separate herself from these negative images, Autumn had to counter and negate them though embracing – and transcending – White western standards of success. In the words of an Aboriginal colleague of hers who works in the area of adoption and fostering, she had to become a "super Indian."

> Our culture values independence and ambition and competence. And Aboriginal adoptees almost invariably personify those. And even if, I mean I've met a lot of adoptees whose lives are very dysfunctional, and yet personality-wise, characteristic-wise there's, the potential is just incredible. I mean, you know, articulate, articulateness, eloquence, intelligence, ambition, competition. And we have to, you know, because we have to be better to be considered okay – even if it's only in our head. But those are the things that we're taught in this, in this White middle-class Canadian culture.

To be accepted by dominant society, and hence, to be accepting of herself, Autumn believes that she came to exemplify the cultural values of independence, competition, and competence. And when people see these values embodied in Autumn, she is told of this, and henceforth comes to perceive herself as better than other Aboriginals. Autumn says that she then positions herself in competition with other Aboriginals and in doing so, moves further away from self-acceptance as an Aboriginal woman.

> One of the messages that I have to get over is that, I'm not sure where it came from or, but I think it ties in here, it's relevant, and that message was that I'm better than other Indians, whether they are regular Indians or adoptees. And it's relevant to that whole thing about competitiveness and the alienation from the Aboriginal self.

The notion that she is better than other Aboriginals is reinforced by remarks made by nonAboriginals who compare her to the socially construed racist traits held to be essentially Aboriginal.

> Unfortunately we get that kind of feedback out there, too. I don't know how many times I've heard, you know, "How did you get here? How did you achieve so much and look how well you've done." The implication being compared to… I've even had people say, "You're much better looking than other Indians." So that myth that comes out, or that we develop in response to the racism and oppression and the alienation from the self.

Viewing herself as superior to other Aboriginal people has come with a cost, for it is difficult to create and maintain relationships while embracing a position of superiority.

> If you're better than other people then it's really hard to communicate. And it's the saddest thing [tearfulness]. And it's something that I see, that's something I know that I've struggled with, um, so much to develop the skills to cooperate with other human beings and learning community. And I see other adoptees struggling with it, too.

Autumn's embodiment of White values along with her drive to be a superior Aboriginal has fostered experiences of isolation and disconnection. It has also led Autumn to become a living contradiction of the Aboriginal stereotype. However, as much as she challenges this unfavorable persona, to those who do not know her, she is no different. In her own mind, and through her own socialization, she is ostensibly White. But this is invisible to most people who simply see her as Aboriginal and therefore respond to her according to the specifications of racist discourse.

> I know how pervasive stereotypes are about Aboriginal people. And even though growing up I didn't really feel Aboriginal, and even as a young adult, I still knew that's how they saw me. But ya it would be frustrating because…for all intents and purposes I wasn't Aboriginal. And yet I knew that's the way they saw me. I couldn't very well say, well, you know I'm not really the way that you think I am [laughter]. Which is all negative, I know [laughter]. I'm really this way.

Autumn reflects that being who she is, she cannot help but negate negative racial stereotypes.

> It's funny, I was just thinking, well, you know, well what would I need to do to not stand in opposition to stereotypes. Well I'd have to go and get myself a bottle of wine and stick it in a brown paper bag and put on my Saturday clothes and go sit on the street corner [laughter].

"An Aboriginal person in a sea of White."

Having been raised in a predominantly White community, Autumn was socialized White and tried to be White such that she might be conferred equal membership within society. Yet racism's lesson to her was that full acceptance into White society (the society in which she always felt most comfortable) would be difficult, if not impossible. On the other hand, she knew she was Aboriginal, but because she was not raised within an Aboriginal community, an Aboriginal identity was foreign to her sense of self. Thus, internally she viewed herself as White,

whereas externally she, and all others, viewed herself as Aboriginal. In recent years, reclamation of her Aboriginal heritage has brought unity to a previously fragmented sense of identity, but Autumn still concedes that pos:-facto socialization can not amend for the socialization she would have had if she were raised in an Aboriginal family. It is this identity conundrum that sets her apart from other Aboriginals and nonAboriginals and which leads her unavoidably to undertake an identity that is uniquely her own. Autumn speaks of the experience of being apart, that is, the sense that her identity is not fully informed though affiliation with White mainstream culture or Aboriginal culture.

> It's a sense of being apart. And it may be a bit of a chicken and egg argument because, you know, am I apart because my whole environment was White and I was forced to be White, and tried to be White, and wanted to be White to fit in, and yet wasn't. So I was set apart that way. And yet because I haven't grown up with any other Aboriginal people...um, I'm apart from them because...I don't know what it is like to be Aboriginal, I don't know what it feels like to be Aboriginal. I don't really know what it feels like to be anything because, um, I mean it would be like if you have a fox that grows up with the dogs, it's just going to want to be with the dogs, right? It will probably try to learn to bark and everything, and run around. Never having lived in a fox environment, you put it with a bunch of foxes, it's going to look and think, what the hell are those things? It may think it's, you know, I may think that I'm White, but I'm not, and I know that – I knew that growing up. Yet, I know I'm Aboriginal but because it's never been part of my experience, I don't know what that's like either. The best that I can ever hope to achieve is knowing who I am, and that's a purely internal thing, because there were no mirrors there. I think in the last...fifteen years that I've been, you know, working with Aboriginal people and immersing myself in my culture that I've been re-socialized to a certain extent, but the formative years have a huge impact in terms of that alienation from any culture. Because I was the only one of my culture, in my world. And my culture was of being an Aboriginal person in a sea of White. So it's basically my own creation, and that will always set me apart.

For many years, being at the crossroads of two disparate and seemingly irreconcilable identities encumbered Autumn with a profound sense of disconnection

and alienation. Feeling that she did not belong to either culture led Autumn to an identity dialectic whereby she became a synthesis of both. Traditional teachings have helped Autumn to achieve the construction of her identity through providing a culturally informed understanding of why she was adopted into a nonAboriginal family.

> This whole experience happened to me for a reason, and it may take the rest of my life figuring out what that reason is. What I've learned so far is that it has something to do with teaching. Because I can teach Aboriginal students and nonAboriginal students because I can see the world through two perspectives. So, I'm particularly effective at teaching nonAboriginal people about Aboriginal people because I can see the world from their perspective and can teach from that perspective. So there isn't like a worldview gap of understanding there. Um, that's part of it. I don't know what else, yet.

Today Autumn looks at her ability to walk in two worlds as a one of many gifts, some of which are yet to be revealed. A gift that Autumn values highly is her ability to foresee the future through dreams which, though not providing the means, do provide insight as to her destination. Now, as she busily works toward her Ph.D., and the prophecies of her last dream have almost all been realized, it is time, she believes, for another dream to come guide her way.

> I thing it always is unfolding, though, I mean the beautiful thing is that, you know, if I live to be eighty I just can't imagine what I'll be doing. That will be something else. Um, but now, life is just exciting, because it's so interesting. And I have, you know, some general ideas, but I don't know, I mean I'm going to have to hurry up and have another dream because ten years is almost up and [laughing] I don't know what comes after that.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This narrative inquiry sought to bring greater understanding to the experience of Aboriginal children who are brought up in nonAboriginal families. The research question asked, What are the life-stories of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families?

What began with a question has ended with a story. A story of one researcher and four participants, each of whom has in turn told their story. As their stories unfold, so do the manifestations of human denouement. The phenomena of one's present life is made sensible through a richly emplotted past, and it is in this respect that the narrative methodology has earned its merit. The stories begin inward with the individual, and emanate outward, grasping to touch the ever-widening ecology of human experience. Stories bring understanding through attaching meaning to the otherwise featureless events of the participants' historical experience. Unstoried events are more precarious to the student of human understanding for their vulnerability to a multiplicity of interpretations and explanations, any of which, in the absence of a supporting narrative, may seem equally plausible and useful. But as events of our lives become narratively configured, the potential number of interpretations decreases, thereby increasing a person's comfort, though always without exactitude, to say "this is how we might understand what has happened."

So, what have we learned from these four stories? What do they tell us about the experience of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families? Do they tell us anything?

I, and now you, the reader, have had the privilege of looking into the storied lives of four remarkable individuals. What we have read are particular renderings, situated as they were, within a particular time, place, and social context. Other stories can be told of these lives, both by the individuals themselves, and by others. Just as one of many portrait artists may come to render their subject in different lights, so might the narrative researcher fashion different storied accounts. However, in both cases the outcome is undeniably the same: the artistic or linguistic rendering is unmistakably that person.

The lives of the four participants have in common that they are all of Aboriginal ancestry, and all were raised in White families, either from infancy or from early childhood. It is through the similarities and differences in their stories that understanding is attained. Presented next are seven "narrative threads" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that appear to resonate through all of the four participants life stories.

Stories of Disconnection

The experience of disconnection is a prominent narrative thread that runs through the stories of Pam, Autumn, and Calvin. This disconnection comes in many forms (exclusion, rejection, alienation, removal), and occurs in differing social and relational contexts (family, friends, culture, community).

Stories of disconnection are especially prominent in Pam's story, beginning with her early apprehension and placement in a White family headed by a physically and emotionally abusive mother. Her new family, which should have afforded emotional and physical safety, became a place of fear and constant vigilance. Pam's attempts to secure love, care, and approval from her mother were unsuccessful. The

rejection experienced in this relationship was replicated in her relationships with siblings, peers, teachers, and the larger community. Membership in Pam's family was often presented as provisional and contingent upon her behaviour, with her status as a foster child only exacerbating this situation. The overriding theme throughout her childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, was one of exclusion and alienation – in a sense being looked upon and treated as a nonperson, the result of which, not surprisingly, was emotional devastation. Herein, racism served as the antagonist to Pam's experiences of exclusion. Anne, Pam's mother, tells her she is ugly, stupid, and bad. These same messages are reinforced through the racist discourse proffered by her peers and the community, while covertly being endorsed by siblings who, she believed, were embarrassed to have an "Indian" sister.

These feelings of alienation and displacement correspond closely to those described by Autumn, who likened her adolescent experiences of disconnection to that of being invisible. Autumn's story of childhood is strikingly similar to Pam's. Both were raised in situations of intense physical and emotional maternal abuse, both experienced rejection by peers at school, and both felt wholly removed from their Aboriginal family, community, and cultural traditions. As with Pam, Autumn describes the incredible emotional pain that accompanies the feeling that one does not belong to this world. At the height of their emotional distress, both Pam and Autumn harboured suicidal thoughts, with Autumn actually attempting to end her life. In Calvin's story, though he does not attest to experiences of disconnection from his adoptive family or the White community, he nonetheless describes feeling very

alienated from the Aboriginal community, to a point where, as with Pam and Autumn, he had no idea how he fit among other Aboriginal people.

It is notable, however, that for all three there were, albeit limited, opportunities to establish some form of relationships with Aboriginal people, communities, or culture. Each in turn declined such opportunities, largely because they knew of the racist stereotypes associated with being Aboriginal, and hence did what they could to distance themselves from this aspect of their identity. They also distanced themselves from their Aboriginal heritage for fear of the unknown, and fear of what they "thought" Aboriginal people were like. Thus when Autumn is provided by her parents with coffee-table literature, ostensibly to familiarize her with her culture, she dismisses it as "quaint historic information about a dying race". And when her parents take her to a powwow, she refuses to leave the car, for fear of a people she saw as utterly foreign to her own socialization, and of whom she associated terrible traits. Calvin shares a very similar story. Growing up he knew he was Aboriginal but did not know how he fit with other Aboriginal people. During adolescence he became more cognizant of negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people, which further reinforced an aversion toward this aspect of his identity, to a point where he could say "I hated being Aboriginal".

It was perhaps a consolation that despite experiencing profound disconnect from the Aboriginal community and his cultural heritage, Calvin always felt accepted by the White community. As already noted, this was not the case for Autumn and Pam, both of whom felt an extreme sense of disconnection from both White and Aboriginal cultures. For these two women, fear of the unknown, along with a desire

to distance themselves from negative stereotypes, deprived them of a will to pursue Aboriginal cultural and community connection. This absence of will meant that even if the means of connection were available (which could be argued they were, though negligibly), Aboriginal strivings were all but absent. The pursuit of belonging to White culture was equally off limits, though in this case, not for lack of will, but for lack of means. What Autumn and Pam allude to in their stories was the need as children to have had someone with whom they could base their unique, bi-racial identity. Kirton (2000) speaks of this requirement among Black transracially adopted children:

> What is needed is a 'secure base' from which to explore identity issues linked to 'race' and culture. This is not one of primordialism, but one of connectedness with those occupying similar locations who may provide similar supports and resources for such exploration. (p. 98)

The absence of a "secure base" left little recourse for Autumn and Pam to resolve the identity conundrum that confronted them, that is, the experience of dislocation from both White and Aboriginal cultures and the immense feelings of loneliness and isolation that this engendered.

Interest in cultural disconnection of this sort has its origins in the early sociological writings of Stonequest (1935) who coined the term "double consciousness" to describe instances where an individual identifies with two cultures simultaneously, but feels alienated by both. This situation, referred by present-day writers as bicultural dislocation (Ishiyama, 1995), is thought to be the outcome of in- or undervalidation of a person's uniqueness, because they do not conform to the

expectations of either culture. Through narrative inquiry it is possible to see how experiences of bicultural dislocation unfold and operate within Pam's and Autumn's stories. In keeping with their experiences of pained disconnection, bicultural dislocation has been associated with adverse emotional states such as grief, depression, and low-self-esteem (Ishiyama, 1995).

Stories of Passing

According to Ginsberg (1996), passing has everything to do with "escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privilege and status of the other" (p.2). For ethnic and racial minorities, the impetus to pass for something different from one's presumed "natural" or essential identity is often born of discrimination and prejudice experienced through the workings of racism (Cutter, 1996). "Passing" is a narrative thread that resonates across the narrative accounts of Pam, Calvin, and Autumn. In their stories, Pam and Calvin are most explicit in their attempts to alter physical appearance so as to pass as something other than Aboriginal. They do so because they are at once drawn away from their Aboriginal identification, and drawn towards a White identification.

In Pam and Autumn's stories, the lure of Whiteness had to do with an intense yearning to belong and be accepted. Raised in White communities and socialized according to White-Western cultural ways, Pam and Autumn "felt White" and thus wanted desperately to feel that they would be accepted members of the White community. For the most part they were not. Instead, because they looked Aboriginal, their experiences were those of rejection, exclusion, and persecution. Thus, they

attempted to become more White so as to subvert the constraints levied by racial and cultural oppression.

Escaping oppression and accessing privilege was an incentive for Pam and Autumn to aspire towards Whiteness. There were, however, additional forces which led them, as well as Calvin, to want to pass as nonAboriginal. Ginsberg (1996) writes that "One of the assumed effects of a racist society is the internalization, by members of the oppressed race, of the dominant culture's definitions and characterizations" (p. 9). Through a narrative interpretive lens, "internalization" might otherwise be construed as the retention of certain stories within our larger storied identity. To the extent that an identity of being Aboriginal seemed to unavoidably involve negative descriptors, Pam, Autumn, and Calvin all strove to "edit out" this aspect of their identities by disowning their Aboriginal racial and cultural heritage. To do otherwise, would, in their minds, be to submit to their relevance. Thus, through childhood and adolescence the will to preserve a positive self-identity motivated Calvin, Pam and Autumn to forsake their Aboriginal heritage and aspire, instead, to the safer ground of Whiteness.

In Calvin's story, he describes how in high school he nurtured an image through dress and hairstyle that led people to believe he was Asian. If he did acknowledge his cultural heritage, it was through a culturally based gag meant to humour peers at lunch. Alcohol was also paradoxically used by Calvin to prove to himself that he was not Aboriginal, as "Indians", as the stereotype held, could not handle their liquor. Sadly, it was a night spent "partying" that led to the tragic taking of another man's life.

For Pam, realizing that "Indianness" was the reason for her mistreatment and exclusion, she tried to become more White on the outside through physical alteration, though all the while feeling very "White" on the inside because of her socialization. In this sense, passing was not only an act of subversion, it was also her remedy for the dissonance between cognitively experiencing herself as White, and the outward physical appearance that betrayed she was not. This disconnect of mind and body finds its dramatic representation in Pam's account of looking in the mirror and being shocked by the "Indian" that looks back. A similar experience is recounted by Autumn who tells of her surprise at seeing all of the "brown faces" gazing down upon her when she meets her biological family for the first time at the airport.

Stories of Diversion

Autumn, Pam, and Calvin, all recount periods of emotional struggle through their adolescence. This is described with greatest intensity in Pam and Autumn's stories, both of whom attribute their debilitating emotional distress to profound feelings of relational alienation, abuse from their mothers, and a disaffirming Aboriginal identity. Calvin also spoke of adolescent identity struggles, which he describes in his story as feelings of insecurity and derision towards his Aboriginal ancestry. For all three, what I refer to as "diversion" is a third narrative thread, seemingly employed to sustain themselves through their most difficult times.

In Calvin's story he describes a growing uneasiness with his Aboriginal identity beginning in early adolescence. By age sixteen he was using marijuana and alcohol on a regular basis, to a point where his stumbling and slurred journeys home brought forth images of the very thing he scorned: the "street-corner native". Though

many youth of all racial and ethnic backgrounds go through periods of experimentation with drugs and alcohol, Calvin suggests in his story that his indulgence was carried out at least in part to divert from the identity troubles of his adolescence.

In Pam's and Autumn's stories there are many undertakings which could be looked upon as acts of diversion. Both sought solace, comfort and escape through social withdrawal and solitary activities (particularly reading science fiction), as a way to evade the pains of their daily existence. Both also turned quite heavily to the use of drugs and alcohol, amphetamines being their drug of choice. Perhaps more so than Autumn, Pam became rebellious through her adolescent years, dressing "wild", hot-wiring cars, and garnering a reputation for associating with older boys.

The transracial adoption literature reviewed earlier does not report the emotional coping strategies noted among participants in this research, perhaps because this literature in general advances a fairly optimistic view of psychological adjustment among transracial adoptees, or perhaps because their quantitative methodologies do not allow for the discovery of unexpected findings the same way that narrative inquiry does. Less optimistic are studies which examine emotional and behavioural problems among biracial children and adolescents. This literature finds that biracial individuals experience increased incidents of gender confusion, self-hatred, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, delinquency, alienation, and denial of self (Herring, 1995). It is assumed that these difficulties arise because the socialization and developmental processes of biracial children are inherently more complex than mono-racial counterparts. Herman (1997), though using a very clinical nomenclature

and writing more generally of child abuse, discusses the "forms of adaptation" which transpire among children who experience severe forms of oppression. Eating disorders, psychoactive drugs, and risk taking behaviours are all considered a means for abused children to regulate their internal emotional states. Herman (1997) writes that it is through these methods that "abused children attempt to obliterate their chronic dysphoria and to simulate, however briefly, an internal state of well-being and comfort that cannot otherwise be achieved" (pp. 109-110). Said another way, it is through such methods of diversion that youth such as Pam, Autumn, and Calvin were able manage emotional lives that at the time felt utterly unmanageable.

Stories of Connection

Stories of connection are a fourth narrative thread found within the life stories of all four participants. Pam, though experiencing many intense forms of disconnection, did harbour feelings of connection to her father, her Aboriginal grandfather, two childhood friends, and a kindly teacher. Similarly, though feeling very disconnected at times, Autumn did feel relationally connected to certain teachers, her father, and in late adolescence, to members of the gay and lesbian community. Calvin felt very connected to both his adoptive family and his peers and friends at school. All such connections are spoken of positively in the participants' stories, and, in keeping with the literature on resiliency (Rutter,1999), appeared to have an ameliorative effect on their experiences of emotional distress. It was only Karen, however, who described a story of childhood connection to Aboriginal culture and community.

As described in her story, through the years she lived at home, and continuing today, Aboriginal cultural experiences and relationships pervaded her family life. In her words, "It was just there". However, it wasn't just there as a special offering to Karen. It is her belief that her parents always enjoyed a relationship with the Aboriginal community and culture, and thus the family's continued involvement was a natural transpiration. That it wasn't presented as "you should do this, this is good for you" enabled Karen to accept her cultural involvement in a way that likely would not have occurred, had she detected a parent-driven mandate. As a child, Karen was not fearful of Aboriginal people, nor was she loathsome toward this aspect of her identity. Instead she felt an affinity toward her racial heritage and thus comfortable – and proud – to claim it as her own. When she did come across negative images of Aboriginal people, she did not experience this as an affront to her own identity, other than feeling disappointed that a poor example was being set.

It is noteworthy that Karen's experiences with Aboriginal culture and communities while growing up match closely with the recommendations given to transracial adoptive parents as promoted by proponents of this form of adoption (McRoy & Freeman, 1986). The centrality of the parent's role in nurturing a positive identity (racial or otherwise) is emphasized by Fogg-Davis (2002) who writes, "For better or worse, one's family, whatever its configuration, is the first 'school,' the first institution of socialization. As such, families stand as critical transfer points for the intergenerational perpetuation of racial meanings" (p. 97). Bagley (1993b) writing of Black transracial adoption suggest that most White parents are able to meet the socialization and identity needs of their transracially adopted child if they are

carefully selected and actively support the child's racial identity. Kirton (2000) though, asserting the possibility for White parents to meet their child's identity needs, suggests that such families "are likely to be highly unusual in their life experiences, networks and personal qualities" (p. 99). The atypicality of which Kirton speaks might well be personified by the personal qualities and parental practices carried out by Karen's parents. Even prior to her adoption, Karen's parents had a sustained and meaningful relationship with the Aboriginal community. This, according to McRoy and Freeman (1986), aids identity development through the provision of contact with positive role models who can negate stereotypic perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities. For Bagley (1993b), the key to successful transracial adoption involves the promotion of ethnic pride "sufficient in degree to defend the young person's ego in the face of ethnic devaluation by the larger community" (p. 84). Though the devaluation of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada is held to be widespread, Karen had always been exposed to more realistic and affirming representations of Aboriginal people, and thus when presented with negative images, whether stereotypical or actual, an affirming identity of being Aboriginal remained intact.

Stories of Reconnection

A fifth narrative thread involves the participants' stories of reconnection. In many ways these are stories of coming home. Aboriginal author Neal Macleod (2001) writes that "the process of 'coming home' is an exercise in cartography, it is trying to locate the place of understanding and culture" (p. 33). It is, as he goes on to say, "the attempt to link two disparate narrative locations" (p. 33). In all four of the participants' stories there are stories of reconnection; stories of returning or

attempting to return home to their communities, their culture, or their birth families; stories of reconciling their "two disparate narrative locations".

In Autumn's story, the disparities of her "White" life and the Aboriginal world from which she was removed are dramatically illustrated by the cultural division experienced when she first reconnects with members of her birth family. Vividly, Autumn describes her initial encounters with an urban Aboriginal culture that seemed entirely foreign to her White middle-class upbringing. Her distaste for this environment lead her to want to flee back to the culture of her comfort, but she did not, for in the end the importance of finding family prevails. In her own words, reconnecting with her birth family was akin to "the completion of a cycle. A coming full circle and returning home, and the doorway to finding my self. Opening the door to finding myself and my roots." (p. 157). Not only was reconnecting with her birth family a way back to her cultural roots, it also fulfilled a longtime emptiness. She longed to find someone with whom she could identify, someone with whom she could look in their eyes and see shades of herself staring back. Pam, too, was desperate to find someone who might begin to fill the relational void that engulfed her existence, leaving her with no one with whom she could base her identity.

> I thought if I knew where I came from, maybe I could understand who I was, or put myself in a place where I could um, maybe even find somebody like one of my relatives that was more like myself, brought up White but was still an Indian. You know? I think that was my main goal to try and find someone more like myself in the family, somebody to say that um, okay that's what I'm

like, that's the way I want to be and, you know, focussing on that. Instead of that feeling of …absolute feeling of not belonging. (p. 82)

Although both Pam and Autumn did eventually locate members of their birth family, Pam was not afforded the same opportunity to develop relationships as was Autumn. Thus for Pam, her Haida mentor, Dave, became the conduit for reconnection with the Aboriginal culture and community.

The degree of emptiness found in Autumn's and Pam's stories is far less pronounced in Calvin's. Though like Autumn and Pam, being raised in a nonAboriginal family Calvin did not have a relationship with Aboriginal people or culture. As with Autumn, Calvin now sees reconnecting with his birth family as key to learning more about his cultural ancestry. He also believes that this cultural reconnection will help him to overcome any remnant fears and inhibitions he has towards this facet of his identity. Karen has also taken steps to reconnect with members of her birth family. However, for her this process is not looked upon as fulfilling a cultural or familial void; rather she talks of her desire in terms of a curiosity to see how her personal qualities and characteristics are represented among those of her biological kin.

Stories of reconnection are not only about reconnecting with birth family; they are also about reconnecting, in a more general sense, with members of the Aboriginal community. For example, in early adulthood both Autumn and Pam found work in band offices, whereas Calvin suddenly found himself surrounded by Aboriginal people during his incarceration. Common among these experiences was the

dismantling of Aboriginal stereotypes, and hence, the fear and disdain that was associated with this aspect of their identity.

In addition to supplanting negative stereotypes, reconnecting with Aboriginal culture and community, especially through traditional cultural and spiritual teachings, helped Pam and Autumn dispel negative beliefs that arose through having childhood experiences that by Western standards would be considered paranormal. Both implore that as children growing up in nonAboriginal families, it would have been invaluable to have had someone who could interpret their experiences from a traditional cultural perspective. Instead, they were looked upon as satanic by Pam's mother, and as possible mental illness by Autumn's father. For both participants it came as a great relief to learn as adults that the mysterious happenings of their childhoods could be culturally explained as ancestral endowments, that is, as cultural gifts, more worthy of veneration than alarm or indignation.

Reconnecting with Aboriginal culture was also significant in terms of reawakening the participants' spiritual lives. This was especially so for Autumn, who today asserts that spirituality is central to how she lives her life and to who she is as a person. In keeping with a culture that de-emphasizes, and perhaps depreciates spirituality, none of the four participants were afforded a spiritual life as children. This, Karen concedes, was a drawback to being raised in a nonAboriginal family. She acknowledges that she had a very happy and rewarding childhood that included both an in-home and community-based cultural presence, yet despite this, her parents were unable to provide the quality of spiritual teachings likely afforded had she been raised in an Aboriginal family.

The experience of reconnecting with members of one's birth family is a neglected aspect within transracial adoption research. None of the studies reviewed for this dissertation included information on this topic. This absence is surprising, given the oft cited advice that transracial adoptive families should live in multiracial neighborhoods, and that the adoptive parents should foster interracial relationships amongst themselves and their children (McRoy & Freeman, 1986). Why, then, should the question of birth family reunification not be raised? Grotevant (2000) suggests that adopted adolescents will construct a narrative of their absent birth parents, regardless of the amount of information available, and that even among same-race adoptions resolution of a "dual identity' is often achieved through familial reconnection. Of course, the increasing practice of open adoptions is making the traditional reunification scenario less prevalent, and indeed Kirton (2000) suggests that open adoption may be conducive to healthy identity development among transracial adoptees.

Stories of Surpassing

A sixth narrative thread running through all participants' stories is that of attaining personal accomplishments which run counter to prevailing Aboriginal racial stereotypes. Karen is an elite athlete. Calvin, who already holds an undergraduate degree, aspires to a law degree, and is a recognized leader within the urban Aboriginal community. Pam became the first Aboriginal woman in North America to earn a diploma in aeronautical engineering. Autumn is in the midst of completing her doctorate in social work. The achievements of Autumn and Pam are particularly

noteworthy when one considers the tremendous adversity that each overcame in order to succeed.

Herein, both Autumn and Pam assert that they intentionally set out to disprove the predominant Aboriginal racial ideology by transcending White standards of achievement. Their drive, as Pam points out, was to show to the White community "what an Indian can be like" – meaning, of course, so much more than what the stereotypic portrayal allows. Achievement, as Autumn alludes to, was both a way to gain acceptance from society and become more accepting of herself: "We have to be better to be considered okay – even if it's only in our head" (p. 159). Today Autumn states that she cannot help but negate stereotypical images of Aboriginal people. This negation has meant entering social territories often considered the exclusive domain of White Euro-Americans. Doing so, as Pam and Autumn attest, both challenges stereotypes, and yields discomfort and disapproval from those who cling to the security of their preconceptions.

In contrast to Pam and Autumn, Calvin and Karen do not associate their achievements with their adoptive status. Nor does the transracial adoption literature present evidence of exceptional achievements among transracial adoptees. Such a finding, however, would be consistent with the theorizing of Alfred Adler (1928), who believed that all children inherently possess feelings of inferiority, and are consequently motivated to strive for superiority, that is, to improve themselves to their utmost capacity and potential.

Stories of Identity Coherence

Questions of identity are a central consideration in all forms of adoption, even more so in transracial adoptive situations, where such questions extend beyond psychological significance and personal ontology to reveal political, ethical, and moral domains of interest (Fogg-Davis, 2002; Grotevant, 2000). The concern in the case of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families, implores us to ask in straightforward fashion: Is there a problem in identity development, and if so, how is it resolved. I believe that identity concerns are evident among some of the participants in this research, and that notions of identity coherence, the seventh narrative thread, are central to this concern.

As noted earlier in my discussion of narrative identity, the ability to tell and live by a coherent story of self is thought to be a central task in identity development (Kerby, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1991). Through childhood and adolescence the story lines of Pam, Autumn, and Calvin seem to lack this requisite quality of coherence. Evident in their life stories are discontinuities, disparities, conundrums, and paradoxes, all of which seemed to make achieving a coherent account of "being Aboriginal yet raised in a nonAboriginal family" difficult, if not seemingly impossible to reconcile. According to Polkinghorne (1991) the inability to reconcile the various plotlines of one's life experiences into a single, coherent narrative, results in feelings of angst and despair. Such an assertion is in keeping with Pam and Autumn's recollections of identity disjunction. For both, an underlying paradox is their experience of "feeling" White, wanting to be White, but being treated in prejudicial and discriminating ways because they looked Aboriginal. In Pam's story

she describes being chastized by her parents for dating an "Indian". After being told that she is too good to be with an Indian, she asks herself, "who am I good enough for then?" In Autumn's story she talks of wanting to approach an Aboriginal peer in school, but decides not to because of the stereotypic qualities she attributed to the peer but not herself; in her mind the peer is Aboriginal, whereas she is not. Calvin relates that in his teen years he would paradoxically describe being intoxicated as "going a little Indian". For all three, Calvin, Autumn, and Pam, there is a sense of struggle in bringing intelligibility to a self story of knowing they are Aboriginal, yet not knowing how this heritage might fit within their identity of being raised in a White family. Not surprisingly, Autumn, Pam and Calvin all spoke of the need as adolescents to connect with someone who could, as Autumn says, act as a mirror to "validate" who she was.

An impediment to identity coherence was the desire for participants to censor out one very crucial story line of their identity: being Aboriginal. Here it can be seen how larger cultural stories operate in the lives of individuals; how they are reflected in discriminatory and prejudicial words and actions; and how they thus have real effects on the lives of individuals. Growing up, Pam, Autumn, and Calvin all became aware of the racist discourse associated with being Aboriginal, and accordingly, all sought to negate this aspect of their identity, for the most part through attempts at "passing". As both Kirby (1990) and Kirton (2000) have noted, individuals who have not yet reached adulthood are more vulnerable to the imposition of negative stereotypic stories of self. This can be seen in Pam, Autumn and Calvin's stories, wherein their stories of childhood and adolescence are subject to forms of third-

person narration which story "being Aboriginal" in negative and disdainful ways. In the absence of any competing narratives, these story lines became unchallenged "truths" of their personhood, wherein new events could only be interpreted as confirmation of the dominant and subjugating story of self.

For Karen, on the other hand, being of Aboriginal heritage seemed to fit seamlessly into her storied identity. As a child she was surrounded by favourable images and experiences of Aboriginal culture. From an early age she was exposed to Aboriginal role models that informed her that being Aboriginal was something of which she could be proud. Not surprisingly, she came to evaluate her identity as an Aboriginal person as decidedly positive, and thus even when confronted with negative images of being Aboriginal, she saw no cause to forgo this aspect of who she was.

It would seem through inspection of the participants' stories that as adults measures were taken which allowed the loose ends of their identities to be reconciled and integrated into more unified and coherent life stories. For Pam, Autumn and Calvin, the starting point for redressing their compromised identity coherence was to find family – to find someone who could add further possibility to the stock of stories which inform what it means to be Aboriginal. Pam recounts as an adolescent her agonizing feelings of having no coherent account of who she was: "I had no identity. I had nothing…I didn't really have a family. I didn't have anybody in the community to identify with…there was nobody else like me" (p. 182). In her story Autumn talks of similar feelings of identity fragmentation, and thus when describing the importance of finding her biological family, does so in terms suggesting unification, integration,

and the attainment of identity coherence: "The big picture significance would be the completion of a cycle. A coming full circle and returning home, and the doorway to finding my self" (p. 157). Calvin similarly notes that he has aspired for twenty-eight years (his whole life) to become a Sundancer, and that it is his biological mother who can bring fruition to this long disconnect from his cultural and racial heritage.

Strivings for narrative coherence are also reflected through all four participants' capacity to come to a larger, overall meaning of being raised in nonAboriginal families. For Pam, Autumn, and Calvin the fact of their adoption, along with the hardships this engendered, is made sensible as adults through their attainment of bicultural competence, that is, their ability to operate effectively in both Aboriginal and White cultural contexts. For example, Calvin describes himself as a chameleon who can strategically alter his self-presentation to fit the requirements of a particular social environment. Calvin uses the term "apple" (red on the outside, white on the inside) to characterize his dual cultural identity. He says that he has come to be proud of this identity, and will use it to the benefit of Aboriginal people (p. 87-88). Autumn similarly speaks of her ability to "see the world through two perspectives" (p. 161). She says she now uses this ability to help teach nonAboriginal people about Aboriginal culture. Karen, though embracing of her Aboriginal heritage, maintains that her proclivity is towards White-Western cultural practices. Her story of adoption is understood in terms of the opportunity she was afforded to realize her athletic potential.

As adult participants there is a sense in hearing their stories that Aboriginal identity is no longer the problem it once was. This is not to say that "everything is

better" or that some form of final resolution has been met. Indeed, Autumn, Pam, and Calvin all suggest that remnants of past identity struggles remain a part of their lives today. In speaking of their adult identities, all do so in a manner that suggests a very fluid, contextual, and multi-faceted identity. Certainly for all, being of Aboriginal ancestry is central to their story of self, yet none profess to an identity that is fully informed by their cultural and racial endowment. Being Aboriginal is an aspect of who they are but is not wholly defining of who they are. Herein, all participants attest that given the particulars of their early socialization, they could not presently discharge themselves of their "White ways" even if they wanted to. In this sense, rather than being definitive of their identity, being of Aboriginal heritage is but one of many identities, all of which coalesce to form an integrated whole. In keeping with notions of narrative and diasporic identities, there is an openness to a "multiplicity of articulations and interpretations of difference that emerge out of overlapping discourses of difference and commonality (Luke &Luke, 1999; p. 229).

A diasporic rendering of identity is aptly illustrated in Pam's and Autumn's stories. Pam describes coming to the realization, after finishing college, that her adult identity is the composite of many identities, all of which are important, though not exclusive, to how she defines herself as a person. Autumn echoes this view when she discusses the unfolding of a fashioned identity that accommodates and transcends a singular view of self: "I was the only one of my culture, in my world. And my culture was of being an Aboriginal person in a sea of White. So it's basically my own creation, and that will always set me apart" (p. 139).

In keeping with this last statement, when Autumn and Pam speak of their adult identities, there is a sense that reclamation of self-authorship has been achieved. As children their identities were fated by the imposition of racist and stereotypic narratives of Aboriginal personhood. These were the acted-upon stories of subjugation and oppression which, in the absence of alternative accounts, became taken-for-granted specifications for who they were. As Kirby (1990) notes "Such external narratives will understandably set up expectations and constraints on our personal self-descriptions, and they significantly contribute to the material from which our own narratives are derived " (p. 6). It is this form of third-person authorship, which seems to have been reversed for Pam and Autumn whose descriptions of their adult identities is reminiscent of the creative self-fashioning proposed by Fogg-Davis (2002) in his discussion of racial navigation. Without denying that we live in a race-conscious society, racial navigation promotes the idea that despite such real and often very strong hindrances, one may refuse to submit to circumscribed accounts of identity, and may instead actively cultivate a very personalized racial self-concept (Fogg-David, 2002). Carr (1986) writing about narrative identity, suggests that "We are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-teller's position with respect to our lives" (p.125). Assuming the position of self-narrator allows us to choose whose voices should be afforded more authority and recognition regarding our personal identity (White, 1997). It is in this respect that the subjugating stories of our life may be reinterpreted and overwritten with a more satisfying and personally relevant account of who we are.

Such an undertaking is commensurate with the aspirational goals set forth by the racial identity models presented earlier in the literature review (Cross 1971; Helms, 1995; Kim 1981; Atkinson et al., 1979). Fundamental to these models is the assertion that attaining a positive racial identity requires one to overcome internalized racism through traversing a series of stages or statuses (MacDougall & Arthur, 2001). Although it would seem that all four participants at the time of their participation had attained a degree of comfort with their racial identity, it is oversimplified and overstated to suggest that this proceeded in a linear, uniform, and categorically discreet fashion, or as already mentioned, that race was even the most salient aspect of their personal identity. Rather, as with notions of diasporic and narrative identities, for the participants in this research, conceptualizations of self manifested as fluid, manifold, and contingent upon social and historical context.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Since the time of first contact, vast numbers of Aboriginal children have been taken from their families and placed in nonAboriginal homes, often, as Fournier and Crey (1997) allege, due to no other reason than poverty and the hardship it engenders. Without question, the appropriation of Aboriginal children from their families and communities has had, and continues to have, a devastating effect on the well being of Aboriginal people across all parts of Canada. In this research I sought to bring greater understanding to the experience of Aboriginal children removed from their birth families at an intimate, individual level, through looking at the stories of individuals who were raised in nonAboriginal families.

In considering the significance of this research, my intention is not to be prescriptive. The findings of this inquiry are not informing of new standards, rules, or policies regarding the placement of Aboriginal children in nonAboriginal families, but rather, serve as a point of reference for further sensitive discussion as to this practice.

Certainly there are compelling political and social reasons for ensuring that Aboriginal children are raised in Aboriginal families and communities; namely to rectify past injustice while promoting the restoration of Aboriginal culture and health as a people. Disruption in the traditional family life of Aboriginal families began from the outset of Aboriginal-European contact, and has continued to present day (Fournier and Crey, 1997). Insomuch as the survival of any cultural group depends on the

survival of that group's children, Aboriginal communities have suffered a great loss through this intrusion.

Through the life stories of four participants, seven narrative threads were identified which further explicate the experiences of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families along with the centrality that identity development assumes within such experiences. Resonating among the participants' life stories are stories of disconnection, passing, diversion, connection, reconnection, surpassing, and identity coherence. Given that all seven narrative threads in one way or another identify racism as a central constituent in identity development, it begs the questions: What protection might be afforded to the Aboriginal child raised in a nonAboriginal family who experiences prejudice and discrimination through an unalterable and fundamental aspect of who they are? Bagley's (1993b) answer to this question is the promotion of ethnic pride "sufficient in degree to defend the young person's ego in the face of ethnic devaluation by the larger community" (p. 84). Such a stance recognizes as a fundamental assumption that we live in a racialized society in which physical appearance has real effects on the daily life experiences of those deemed nonWhite. For this reason, authors such as Bagley (1993b) and Kirton (2000) implore that the parents of transracial adoptees must not assume a colour-blind disposition toward their multiracial family.

The findings of this research support such an assertion. The storied accounts of Pam, Autumn, and Calvin suggest that matters relevant to the development of a positive racial and ethnic identity were addressed in a partial and unconvincing fashion. Without this, the likelihood of a positive Aboriginal identity was greatly

diminished, wherein "White" became the preferred racial identification. As Pam and Autumn attest, they tried to be White because they were socialized to feel White, and given society's messages, came to believe that White was the best and only way to be. They, along with Calvin, rejected their Aboriginal heritage because of the pervasive negative connotations associated with this identity. Doing so, however, was not easy, for if a person looks Aboriginal they are treated as Aboriginal – despite feeling at a subjective level that they are not.

Karen, on the other hand, though in many respects embracing of White culture, grew up with cultural opportunities that, as Bagley (1993b) would say, "defended" her ego against the racial denigration that Aboriginal people inevitably encounter. Given her story, it would seem also that the particular way in which Karen's parents infused Aboriginal culture into the culture of the family made it more likely that Karen would be responsive to their efforts. As explained in her story, traditional culture was not presented as a contrived offering solely for her benefit; rather, it was an integral part of family life for all to enjoy, learn from, and embrace. Herein, receptivity was not an issue for Karen, as the cultural experience was always "just there" along with the requisite role models for developing a positive identity.

Although three of the four participants have had significant difficulties in assuming a positive Aboriginal identity, it can still be said that in all cases some form of positive family relationship existed while growing up, and in some way has continued to endure into the present. This is especially so for Calvin and Karen, though even for Pam and Autumn, both of whom suffered considerable experiences of abuse, relational connections persist. It can also be said that if it were not for the

presence of racist discourse towards Aboriginal people, the probability of a more positive outcome would have been greatly increased. It seems that the difficulties which arose did so not due to the inability of Aboriginal children to attach to nonAboriginal parents per se, but due to inability of such children to acquire a positive Aboriginal identity in the face of a society which devalues and denigrates this aspect of their being. As adults, positive experiences of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal relationships have done much to displace the once-held negativity towards this aspect of their identity. However, as adults there is also a sense that Aboriginal identity is but one of many identities, any of which can assume greater relevance depending on personal expediency and the context at hand.

As previously noted, there is little extant research which addresses the experiences of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families. The two studies of note which do exist (Bagley, 1993b; Fanshel, 1972) both raise concerns over potential identity problems among this population of adoptees. Bagley (1993b) speculates at the conclusion of his research that identity problems may be the root cause of the increased incidents of depression, low self-esteem, suicidal behaviours, and behaviour problems found among his adopted Aboriginal participants. Fanshel (1972) similarly cautioned that although his young Aboriginal participants seemed to be adjusting quite well to their transracial living arrangements, identity problems could become prominent as the children reach adolescence. I contend that a better understanding of identity concerns among Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families has been achieved through using narrative inquiry to present the life-stories of four adult participants. It might be said, then, that the present

research adds to previous research through providing the contextual information needed to understand how the storied outcome of a participant's life is influenced by their unique relational landscapes, that is, their relationship with family, community, culture and society, all situated within a specified time and place.

The results of this inquiry have implications for both educators and practitioners of counselling psychology. The pedagogic utility of this research is realized through the capacity of life-stories to bring new meaning and greater understanding to the experience under study. These new meanings and understandings are both instrumental and personal. For example, at an instrumental level, students who read the participants' life-stories learn about the role that racism plays in the shaping of personal identity for Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families. Such learning is consistent with the aspirations of multicultural counselling competencies which encourage counsellors to be aware of their client's worldview, including knowledge about sociopolitical influences which shape the life experiences and personal identity of racial and ethnic minorities (Arrendondo et al, 1996). At a personal level, richly described life-stories have the capacity to evoke a strong emotional and personal connection between participant and reader. Such intimate connections often leave a lasting and transformative impression upon a person, and can lead to shifts in world view that are not easily displaced.

For the counsellor practitioner, the significance of this research is twofold. First, through reading the participants' life stories, it becomes clear that racism towards Aboriginal people in North American society has real effects on the identity development and emotional experiences of Aboriginal children raised in

nonAboriginal families. Efforts to ameliorate this situation requires the promotion of cultural connection through ongoing and meaningful relationships between the adopted or fostered Aboriginal child and the Aboriginal community, beginning early in life and involving all family members.

Secondly, the results of this inquiry emphasize the importance for counsellors to look beyond decontextualized accounts of personal distress in which the loci of difficulty is individual deficiency. Reading the life-stories of the four participants allows what might otherwise be construed as individual pathology to be recast and redirected to its rightful source, that of a deleterious social environment. This stance is in keeping with the work of Charles Waldergrave (1990) and his promotion of a "just therapy" which directs attention and intervention towards forms of social injustice thought to undermine individual and group psychological well-being.

Limitations of the Research

In this research I aspired to collect, and then present, the personal narratives of four Aboriginal adults who were raised in nonAboriginal families, all the while adhering to the accepted standards of investigative rigour associated with qualitative research. In the methodology chapter of this research, I wrote considerably of the narrative research approach, its features and my reason for choosing it. Here I outlined the differences between quantitative and qualitative standards for the production of valid or trustworthy knowledge for each. Central to the questions of credibility in the case of narrative inquiry is the extent to which one's research findings embody the qualities of persuasiveness, correspondence, coherency, and pragmatic use (Reissman, 1993). In this instance, unlike notions of validity in

quantitative research, numbers cannot be the arbiter of these criteria. Rather, it is up to the reader, be they participant, lay people, or those in academia, to ascertain the degree to which the standards for credible narrative inquiry has been met (Mishler, 1990).

If, however, I were to judge this research according to the standards of credibility associated with a quantitative epistemology, the following aspects of my research may be of concern.

By most standards, the sample size for my research is very small. Certainly this is so for quantitative research designs, where it would be inconceivable to have a sample size of four, though it is also the case for other forms of qualitative research (e.g., grounded theory). It can be argued that use of a small sample size limits the generalizeability of my findings, wherein including more participants would increase confidence that my results might be representative of the general population of Aboriginal transracial adoptees. A larger sample size may also have generated added insight, complexity, and understanding to the topic under study, the tradeoff being, however, a lengthy and perhaps cumbersome final document.

Retrospective studies, this one included, are also vulnerable to cohort effects, wherein the phenomenon under study is significantly influenced by sociohistorical factors. The participants in this research were children in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Their experiences may or may not reflect the experiences of children growing up in the first decade of the new millenium. It is therefore incumbent upon the critical reader to judge the viability and relative merits of generalizing these findings across subsequent generations.

Similar concerns involve the particular demographics of the four participants, all of whom were raised in either Alberta or Saskatchewan. To the extent that regional variations in sociocultural climate engender varying degrees of racial and cultural intolerance (Ponting, 1990), it can be argued that the social experience of Aboriginal peoples will vary accordingly. In other words, it would stand to reason that if racism towards Aboriginal people were more prominent in one province or region versus another, the outcome of this research would likely be altered. In narrative terms, we would say that the story's "place" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) or setting, inescapably influences individual and collective life experiences, and that this is reflected in the stories that are told.

It is also worth noting that all four participants were mid-range in socioeconomic status and were either university or college educated. Had I included participants from a different population, say, for example, from within the justice system, the resultant life experiences, and hence, life stories, may well have been different.

Future Research

Currently there is a paucity of social science research that examines the experience of Aboriginal children raised in nonAboriginal families. Although the present research adds to the small existing body of research through rendering four richly described narratives of this experience, there are, of course, numerous possibilities for future research.

At the outset, it would likely be beneficial to continue forth in the tradition established in the present research, that is, to systematically collect and present

additional stories of Aboriginal adults who were raised in nonAboriginal families. Herein, differing demographic groups could be looked at to help ascertain the influence of region, cohort, and socioeconomic status on the storied life experiences. Extending this work through collecting the stories of other family members would also be a beneficial enterprise. Narrative inquiry could be used to bring greater understanding to the experiences of the adoptive parents or nonAboriginal siblings. Alternatively, stories could be collected of the Aboriginal parents who either voluntarily or involuntarily relinquished their child to nonAboriginal care. The storied accounts of all such groups would broaden and enrich our understanding of transracial Aboriginal adoption.

Another very interesting and potentially valuable direction for research involves inquiry into the efforts of White adoptive parents groups who strive to provide in depth cultural experiences to their children from an early age. One such group operates out of Edmonton, Alberta. Assessing the experiences of these youth and their families may lend support to the contention that cultural interventions help ameliorate negative life events such as those experienced by participants in this research.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Participation

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled "A Narrative Study of Aboriginal Children Raised in Non-Aboriginal Adoptive Families." The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the experience of Aboriginal children raised in non-Aboriginal families through the telling of their stories. At present, little research is available to help understand this experience, despite the significant number of adoptions that have historically taken place and continue to take place. By participating in this research you will help bring increased insight into the emotional, social, and relational nature of this type of adoption. It is thought that this information will be of interest to other social science researchers, policy makers, adoptees and their families, and to the Aboriginal community.

Your involvement will require participation in three-to-five audio-taped interviews. Each interview will be arranged at your convenience and will be one-to-two hours in length. The interviews will be informal in nature and can take place at any mutually agreed upon location as long as it is relatively quiet. You will also be asked to read and provide feedback on the accuracy of tape transcriptions and appropriateness of interview analysis.

As a participant you are entitled certain rights. These include the right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation and the right to have all personal information kept strictly confidential and anonymous. You also have a right to know of any risks that may be involved though participating in the study. No such risks are anticipated in this study over and above the sometimes emotional nature of telling your story. You are likely already aware of this possibility, if you are not, please be advised that the interview process may bring forth strong emotions.

Do you have any questions? If you do not and would like to participate in the study please sign below. This indicates that you have read and understand the above rights and provisions of consent. If at anytime throughout participation you have further questions please feel free to contact me (Simon Nuttgens) or my supervisor:

Simon Nuttgens
Wood's Homes
270-1765

Dr. Barbara Paulson
Department of Educational Psychology
6-110G Education North
University of Alberta
Phone: 492-5298

Participant_____ Date_____

Researcher_____ Date_____

Please initials here to acknowledge receiving a copy of this consent form _____